PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

SEPTEMBER 08

SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 10 (September 2008)

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PREVIEWS

We play all the HOLIDAY HITS!
BioShock
SOCOM: Confrontation
Resident Evil 5
And much more!

HOW TO RULE METAL GEAR ONLINE

EXCLUSIVE HANDS ON
Shaun White Q&A
First online details
PSP version revealed

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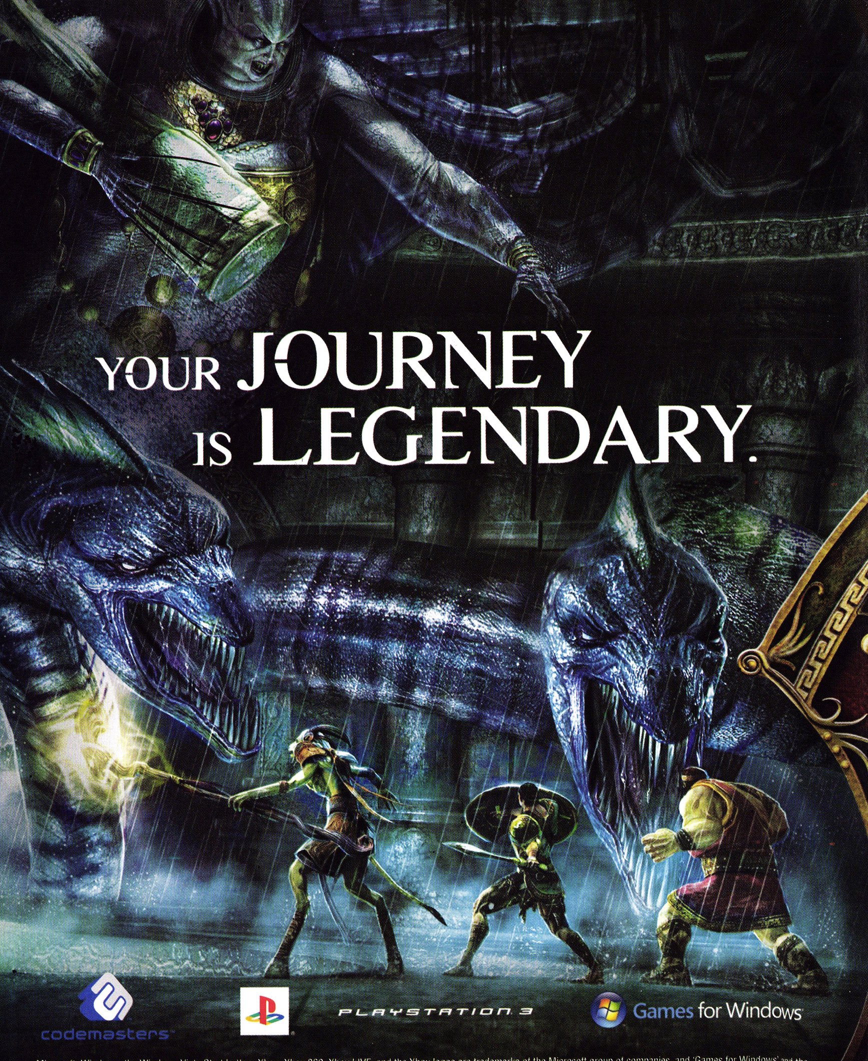
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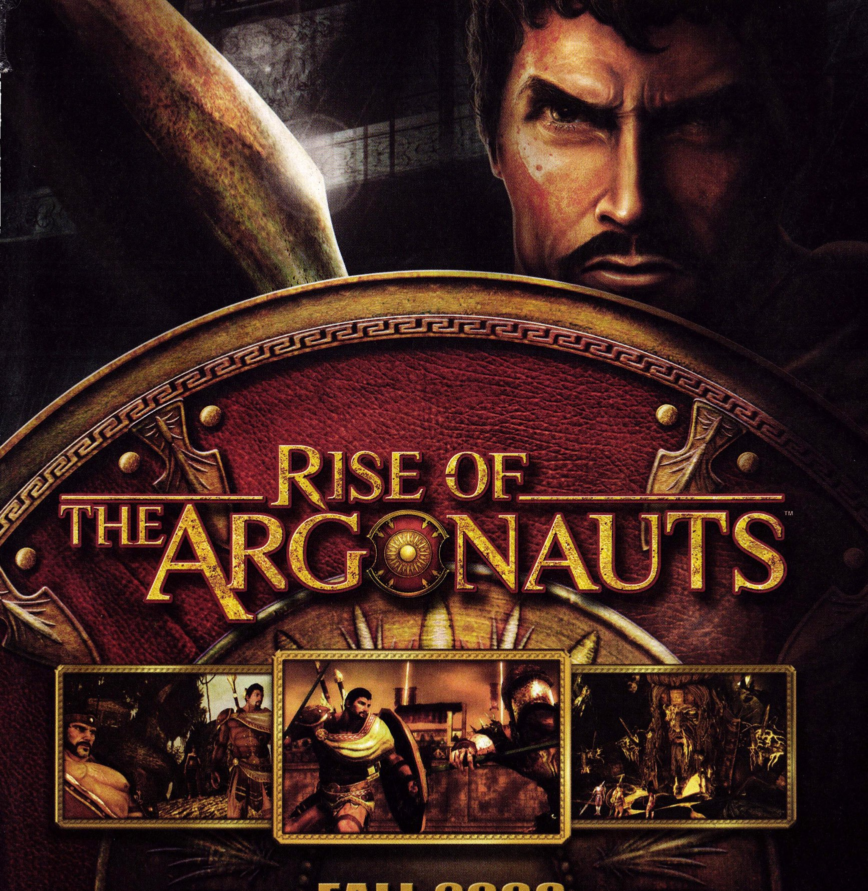

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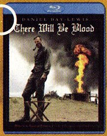
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS
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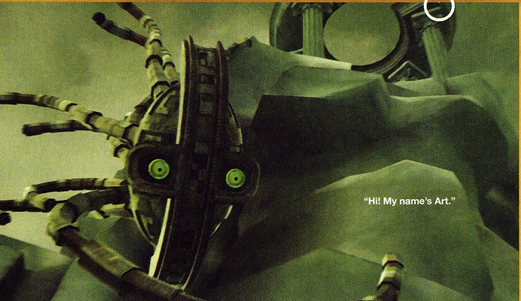
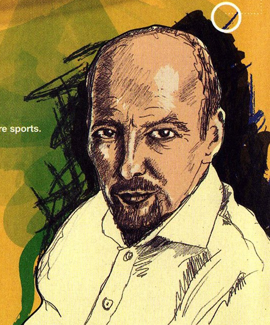
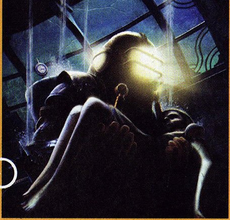


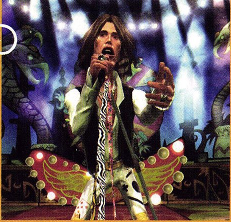
"Hi! My name's Art."



Moore sports.



"Under the sea, Under the sea, Darling it's better, Down where it's wetter, Take it from me!"



"So I tell my agent, 'I'll let 'em make an Aerosmith game when wings grow out of my butt...'"

"Don't cha wish your imaginary girlfriend was hot like me?"

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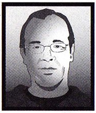
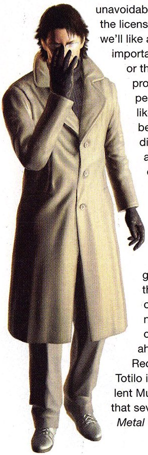
"What? This old thing? I only dress like this when I don't care how I look."



Editor's Note

"You know, most people would kill...to be treated like a god, just for a few moments."

Read a lot of videogame forums and you'll consistently come across diatribes about the opinions in, and ethics of, reviews. In 15 years working in this industry, eight as an EIC, I've never got embroiled in the debates, largely because I view my responsibility as first and foremost to you, our actual readers, and not the forum denizens who are most likely not, nor will ever be, our readers. Similarly, when self-appointed ombudsmen—who have never worked a day at an online or print games media outlet—pontificate for the sake of a few headline clicks, I've left them to their own ego fluffing.



As an official print magazine we get tarred with brushes that are obvious and unavoidable. Since we have the license, it's assumed that we'll like and rate highly every important PS3 release—first- or third-party. I have no problem saying that my personal inclination is to like games first, and to be cynical about them a distant second; and that a vital responsibility to our readers—to ensure that we provide trustworthy buying advice—fuels every decision. SCEA executives read the magazine and they'll gladly tell me what they think of the scores and opinions we print—but not *ever* what those opinions should be ahead of time.

Recently, MTV's Steve Totilo in his generally excellent Multiplayer blog revealed that several outlets reviewing *Metal Gear Solid 4* had been presented with a non-disclosure agreement ahead of time requiring certain pieces of information about the game not to be detailed in their reviews (install length, cutscene time, and others). Unfortunately, though PTOM (and myself, in particular) was the very first outlet to review the game, we weren't asked if we were presented with the NDA; meanwhile, the story proliferated among the blogosphere and forum sites with the assumption (in part due to that Official-dom) that we'd done as Konami commanded. This was frustrating for several reasons, top of the list being that it wasn't actually true. For the record, Konami never mentioned an NDA to us, never asked that we don't mention any elements, never placed any roadblocks on our journey through the review process. (I let Stephen know, and he did an update story to that effect, but of course since it was after the fact and less sexy, it didn't get anything like the attention of the initial piece).

> "My personal inclination is to like games first, and to be cynical about them a distant second."

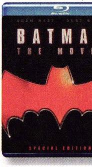
The five-star rating and gushing adoration of *MGS4* was all my own!

Our five-star rating system doesn't allow for some of the range available in other score systems (we have no 9.5 or 8.5, for example), so when you cross-reference our scores with those elsewhere you'll see a narrower range. We like that for bringing the system down to a simpler level of recommendation. We're not afraid to use the five, like we're not afraid to use the one star (or even zero). Just wanted to make that clear—and be sure to let us know how we're doing!

Rob

"Quote" contest

Enter to win a Blu-ray movie! Unless you're a first time reader (in which case, welcome) you should know that the headline at the top of this column is a quote from a movie. Identify the movie, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with Ed Note September in the subject line. I'll pick one lucky winner at random to receive a Blu-ray movie. I'll be sending one out to Larry Floyd of Irving, TX, who identified the quote from *The Longest Day.*



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Fallout 3

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Games for Windows XBOX 360 LIVE PLAYSTATION 3

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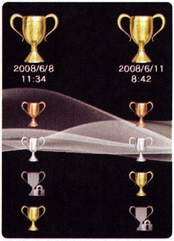
PS3 FIRMWARE UPDATE

PLAYSTATION ONLINE COMES ALIVE

With the 2.40 firmware update, Sony rewards players with the first major feature expansion, kick-starting PS3's online future



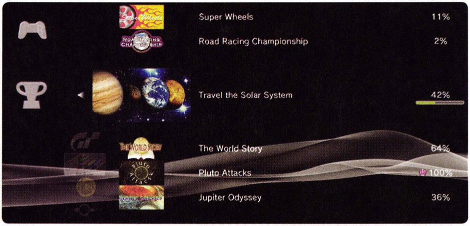
You can easily compare your trophy collection against those of your friends, see what you've earned, what they've earned, and swap advice (or keep it to yourself if you're competitively inclined).

This is the biggest firmware update we've done so far," declares Eric Lempel, Director of PlayStation Network Operations. Absolutely no doubt about it. By the time you read this, many of you will already have experienced firmware update 2.40, which released on July 2. But regardless of whether it delivers the features you've craved, 2.40's release marked the moment that PlayStation 3's online functionality took a massive step forward, proving that: a) it could; and b) SCEA has heard the demands voiced by its audience—and acted.

That first part is probably the most important, illustrating so clearly that PS3 functionality is driven by software, not hardware—meaning future significant progressive iterations can also be delivered through software updates. Clearly, 2.40 is a launching pad, displaying the kind of extensibility and promise that we've anticipated but hadn't yet experienced. Just look at some of the details: in-game XMB (cross media bar), accessible with a tap of the PS button, giving you access to your Friends list and music playlist (if your game supports that feature). A treasure trove of minor tweaks incorporated solely to satisfy PS3 gamers, including a Google search bar and a date/time clock ("You won't believe how many people asked for that one," Lempel chuckles). But most important: trophies. Finally, Sony has a system for rewarding players for…playing games!

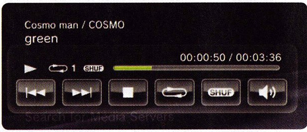
Accruing levels like an RPG is familiar to virtually anyone who's ever picked up a PlayStation controller. But other than bragging rights (a considerable motivation in itself), do you actually earn anything as, say, a PS3 Level 10? Though he couldn't offer any details, Lempel indicated that plans are afoot for rewarding high-end users who play enough games and earn enough Trophies to power up the level ranking. Lempel also isn't worried about core players reaching the outer limits of the ranking system. "We've built the system to last a long, long time," says Lempel of the underlying software that powers these servers.

For the games that support Trophies at launch (it's a relatively small list, topped immediately by *Super Stardust HD* "because the developers picked it up immediately and ran with it first," according to Lempel), the enhancements represent a new lease on life (and retail shelves). Indeed, for plenty of gamers, the promise of earning Trophies is enough to spur a purchase of a previously overlooked title, be it a new PSN game or a classic PS3 release that's been patched to support Trophies.

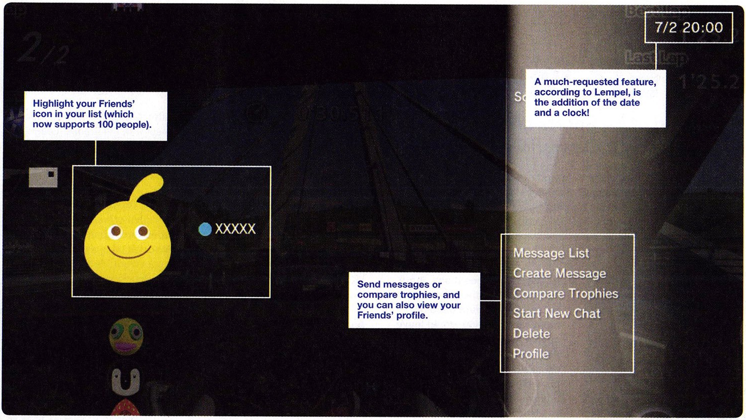


Super Wheels	11%
Road Racing Championship	2%
Travel the Solar System	42%
The World Story	64%
Pluto Attacks	100%
Jupiter Odyssey	36%

How many trophies you've earned is tracked using a percentage scale. If it appears you have all the trophies, but this number doesn't show 100% (and no platinum), then you're missing a hidden award.



In-game playlists finally provide a reason to put your music collection on your PS3.



Highlight your Friends' icon in your list (which now supports 100 people).

A much-requested feature, according to Lempel, is the addition of the date and a clock!

Send messages or compare trophies, and you can also view your Friends' profile.

With the game still running in the background (some will automatically pause, but that's up to the game makers to decide) you can access your Friends list by hitting the PS button.

BRONZE, SILVER, GOLD, PLATINUM

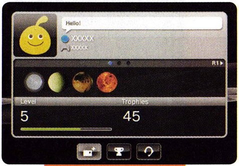
There's a genius idea, a concept that speaks to the very heart of gamers around the globe, in the notion that we want to be rewarded for the time we spend playing games. Trophies provide us with that payoff. Though including Trophy support isn't currently mandated by SCEA, Lempel confirmed that eventually, after the current wave of games have made it through the development process, new games entering production would be required to support this system. Let's face it: Why wouldn't you want to?

To provide developers with flexibility in the Trophy system, a points construct works in the background, and each game can award its own number of bronze, silver, and gold trophies for in-game actions (that when, ahem, achieved, triggers an on-screen alert that the Trophy has been earned). So you might find some games with, say, 15 bronze trophies, six silver, and just two gold, and others with 10, five, and five, or whatever. Whatever the case, only one platinum trophy will be available, and that will be awarded after earning all the other trophies for that game. In addition, earning a platinum trophy will have a much greater impact on your overall PSN level rating than earning oodles of lower-rank trophies. (Lempel also told us these platinum trophies will only be available in "bigger" games, so you can't cruise your way through a minor PSN game to artificially inflate your ranking.) At the whim of the game developers, some trophies can also be completely hidden. A percentage scale for every game will tell you how close you are to earning all the trophies for a particular game—so if it's sitting on 95% completion, for example, but the list implies you've unlocked all the trophies for that game, then you know a hidden opportunity lurks somewhere in the game world. You can also compare your trophy list with that of your friends (and in the spirit of increased "friendship" that this update may encourage, the 50-person friends limit has been doubled to 100).

In the next few months all the major SCEA first-party games will be patched to support Trophies. You won't be able to "cheat" your way to unlocking them through saved games, however. You'll need to play through them again from scratch when the patch is installed in order to start unlocking them. Support is also coming from many third-party developers, with *BioShock,* for example, confirmed to support Trophies at launch: "We're a game that supports Trophies. We're a big fan of rewarding players for the things that they achieve," the game's executive producer, Alyssa Finley, told us.

While the 2.40 release isn't a complete cure-all, patch-all for features we hope to see supported online—no voice messaging, no in-game web browsing, no cross-game invites to friends—it certainly goes a long way to getting PS3's online functionality more on par with, well, what those other guys have been doing.

So now that it's out, what do you think, and what are the top features and functions left on your wish list? Send us an email at PTOM_Letters@futureus.com and let us know.



Your all-new PlayStation Network profile

Collecting the new trophy and level information together is aided by a newly designed profile screen. This profile allows you to type in your own personal motto for that stamp of originality. It also displays the last eight trophies that you earned (and developers are free to design the icon for their trophies however they choose, so the collection should be colorful and original). Below that is your PlayStation "level" along with a bar indicating how far you've progressed towards "dinging" up to the next level. From this screen you can also view your entire trophy collection and send messages to friends.

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

PETER MOORE

As the head of EA Sports he gets to go to every major sporting event throughout the world. Lucky #$@&*!

You might know the name from his prominent role as head of marketing (and also development) at those other next-gen console guys. So Peter Moore's switch to head-up EA Sports caught a lot of industry observers by surprise. But his past history in the sports industry alongside a passion for all sports (particularly soccer and Liverpool football club), lured Moore to the role. With the 09 versions of many EA Sports games showing great potential, we quizzed Moore on his grand plans for the division.

Peter Moore 411

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Masters Degree, California State University, Long Beach

SPORTS:

President, Patrick USA

Senior VP of Marketing for Reebok International

GAMES:

Senior VP at Sega overseeing marketing for the Dreamcast launch, then President and COO of Sega of America.

Corporate VP of the Interactive Entertainment Business at Microsoft, responsible for marketing and cultivating relationships with third-party game publishers and developers for the Xbox business.

PTOM: What does it say about EA Sports that the VP of marketing and product development for Xbox 360 would leave such a huge first-party role?

PM: Well it was a complex decision for me, in that it was primarily family oriented. I had a phenomenal job, no reason whatsoever to leave. But to get the family back together again, back down in the Bay Area, there is only one job I would leave for, which would combine my passion and experience in sports. I'm often called a "videogame industry veteran," but I'm really not. I'm a "shoe dog" that was seventeen years working in athletic footwear, and I'm in my ninth year in the videogame industry. The last position I had was senior vice president at global sports marketing for Reebok. Then tying into my Sega experience building Sega sports, and then ultimately 2K Sports, interestingly to challenge EA in this space.

As a Brit, does this passion extend to all sports?

Pretty much. I mean for a Brit I'll talk baseball, American football, basketball, and college football. Hockey, I maybe struggle with a little bit. Then soccer, rugby, cricket. So I have a very unique balance of being a foreigner that grew up with the core British sports. I actually spent time trying to learn baseball. I'll always remember when I was a shoe salesman for Patrick in the early days, and I was living in Long Beach and I would say to my wife "I'm going to go to Dodger Stadium and I'm just going to sit there." Since then I evolved from being a Red Sox fan, into a Red Sox fanatic. That was moving to Boston in the early '90s and catching the fever and all the angst that went along with that.

What's a day in the life of running EA Sports like?

It's a lot of fun. I don't in any way underestimate the privilege that I have to be able to go to great events. Yesterday, at NASCAR, I'm in the pits because I have an all-access pass; at the same time I'm there drinking up the culture and understanding what we need to do better. As glam as it may sound I arrive in Vienna [for the Euro Championship Final] around noon and then I immediately have to roll into meetings with partners at UEFA, and then I'll roll the next morning directly to Zurich to meet with FIFA, and then the day after that I go right to London to meet with the Premier League. As fun and cool as it is, there's a lot of work and a lot of travel. But I wouldn't change it for the world.

> "I arrive in Vienna [for the Euro Championship Final] around noon and then...into meetings with partners at UEFA, and then...directly to Zurich to meet with FIFA, and then the day after that I go right to London to meet with the Premier League."

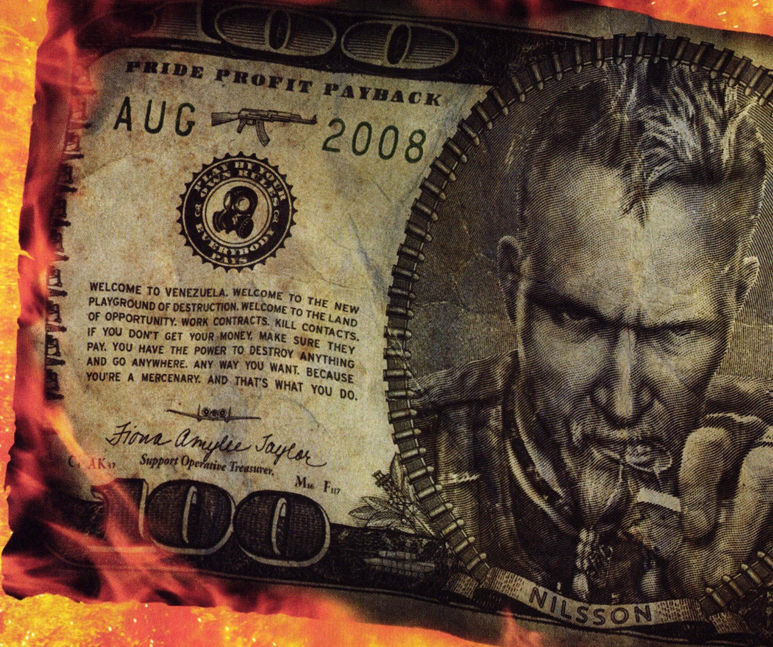
When you're doing a yearly iterative process every game goes through ups and downs. Madden 09 is a far removed beast from Madden 08. What are your goals?

My role is to lay down the strategic pillars of what we need. We need to globalize our business, we need to digitize the distribution, we need to be stronger online, we need to really leverage the licenses we pay hundreds of millions of dollars a year for. And then we need to look at expansions of the brands. It's been, many years since we've launched a new piece of IP (I think since 2002). It's time for us to be able to balance out our portfolio, quite frankly find some games that give us better operating margins where we're not writing huge checks to everybody and their brother as part of the royalty deals. And have some new fresh experiences that are perhaps more applicable to the new consumer coming in.

Does the PS3 feature set allow for more creativity and experimentation?

The bigger hard drive gives you more flexibility to do bigger downloads depending on what Sony will feel comfortable with us doing. And I think we're looking at that. Once Home gets up and running we can have a presence in that entry point to the network; what that means for EA Sports is that we're trying to do our best to help out there as well. But really, it's a function of install base; it's a function of getting a lot of games that have great online features, and it's getting that PS3 consumer to go online immediately. And I think we're starting to see that.

Illustration by Ken Bousquet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EVERYBODY PAYS
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NILSSON

WELCOME TO VENEZUELA. WELCOME TO THE NEW PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION. WELCOME TO THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY. WORK CONTRACTS. KILL CONTACTS. IF YOU DON'T GET YOUR MONEY, MAKE SURE THEY PAY. YOU HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY ANYTHING AND GO ANYWHERE. ANY WAY YOU WANT. BECAUSE YOU'RE A MERCENARY. AND THAT'S WHAT YOU DO.

Fiona Amylee Taylor

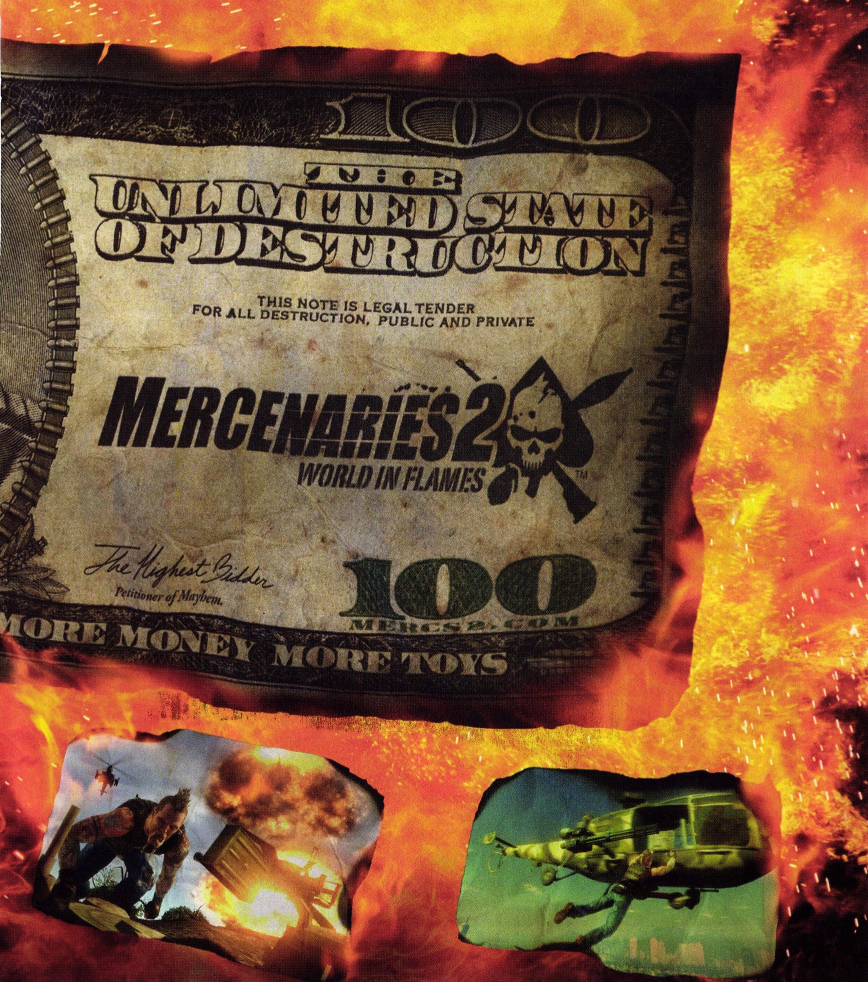
Support Operative Treasurer.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Use of Alcohol
Use of Tobacco
Violence

XBOX 360 LIVE

AVAILABLE ON PLAYSTATION®2 AND PLAYSTATION®3 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS


100
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MORE MONEY MORE TOYS

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

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PANDEMIC

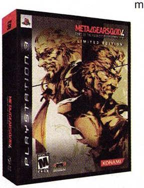
EA

PlayStation Digest

Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

"Snake, your game seems to be doing...amazingly well."

If you forgot to pre-order the delicious Limited Edition version of *MGS4* (which we vouch was absolutely worth every penny) and you want one now, be prepared to shell out top dollar for a copy. The original LE package retailed for $84.99, but you'll be hard-pressed to find any store—online or off—that still has copies in stock. The alternative is to procure a copy from eBay or the Amazon Marketplace, but be prepared to spend around $130 for it!

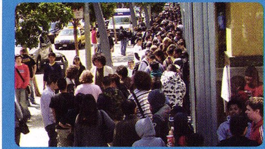


The Limited Edition content was wrapped in a tin case featuring artwork by Yoji Shinkawa, a long-time Kojima Productions illustrator and concept artist. Inside the case, next to a copy of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots,* was a Blu-ray container holding a *MGS4* soundtrack (with tracks by the game's music composer Harry Gregson-Williams, as well as Nobuko Toda and Ennio Morricone), and a bonus Blu-ray disc with special interviews and documentaries, including an insider view of Kojima Productions polishing up *MGS4.* We garnered from the Blu-ray that it isn't easy to make a game like *MGS4*—Kojima is a total perfectionist! The whole package is definitely worth the extra $15 bucks we paid. But is it worth the extra $70 bucks an auction bid might require? That's your call.

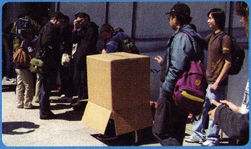
If you need even more proof that the *MGS4* launch was a resounding success, even the $500 80GB PS3 *MGS4* bundle is hard—though not quite as hard—to find. The bundle comes with a standard backwards-compatible 80GB PS3, a DualShock 3 controller, a regular copy of *MGS4,* and a free download voucher for *PAIN*—and each new batch is being snatched up as soon as it hits stores. We all knew *MGS4* would be popular, but with these bundles still going for around $600 on eBay, even we're left a little dumbfounded.

WHAT WOULD A LAUNCH BE WITHOUT SOME PARTIES?

We attended the one held at the PlayStation store in San Francisco.

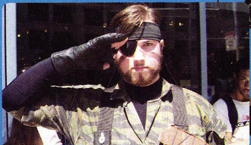


The line to meet Hideo Kojima, actress Yumi Kikuchi, producer Kenichiro Imaizumi, and associate producer Ryan Payton went around the block multiple times. Only those who arrived early were able to meet the game's makers.



Stealthy...stealthy... Now, we just need to Photoshop exclamation and question marks over the heads of those onlookers.

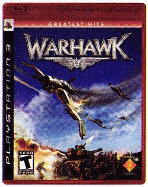
Woohoo, cosplayers! We need to find out who did Meryl's hair...and why does she have a Snake doll? Old Snake's hair is looking good, too.



Quick! Is this Solid Snake or Naked Snake? Hint: pay attention to which eye the eyepatch is on...

SCEA ANNOUNCES

PS3 Greatest Hits line



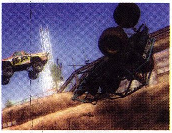
You just knew this day was coming—the day when all of those PS3 games you wanted to play but just didn't have the scratch to call your own would be blessed as "Greatest Hits" and come down to a more library-building price point. That day, July 28, 2008, is here as SCEA has announced the availability of the first 10 games in the PlayStation 3 Greatest Hits lineup.

How much? All PS3 Greatest Hits games carry a suggested retail price of $29.99, and will come in a flashy red box. These games weren't just sales successes, but were hits with the critics as well—with the composite score of all 10 games averaging a 4.25 star rating with the PTOM editorial staff and the Metacritic.com average coming in at 83.7. Expect to see more titles added to the GH list in the coming months.

THE LIST:

Warhawk

The online multiplayer battlefield hums with hundreds of games being played to this day. Take to the skies in Warhawks or man tanks, turrets, or infantry roles in slick, well-paced levels.



MotorStorm

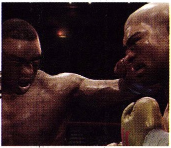
At launch, the next-gen visuals and bone-shaking crash cam only scratch the surface of this multi-vehicle racer. Trucks against bikes against buggies in a variety of tracks (with additional courses now available as downloadable content) provide tons of varied racing action.

Resistance: Fall of Man

Insomniac produced the franchise-establishing shooter for PS3 to great acclaim. With the upcoming *Resistance 2* prepping for release, this is a great opportunity to find out what the fuss is all about if you missed it at launch.

Call of Duty 3

Though eclipsed by the universally acclaimed shift to modern warfare in *Call of Duty 4,* this World War II turn is frenetic, fun, and well crafted. This sensational franchise has hardly had a misstep, and this one's a bargain at the price.



Fight Night Round 3

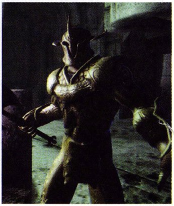
Electronic Art's since-shuttered Chicago studio created a pugilistic gem that combined terrific gameplay progression with spectacular real world fighters, and a seamless control mechanism. Even non-boxing fans got a kick (or a punch) out of this one, which says a lot for its surprisingly broad appeal.

Need for Speed Carbon

Offering stylish arcade racing action, this powerhouse franchise delivers a great street racing alternative to *MotorStorm's* off-road experience.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas

Don't mess with Sin City. That's the message loud and clear as Team Rainbow descends on America's playground to thwart a terrorist threat. Great level design and tense tactical action make this turn worthy of the quality franchise name.

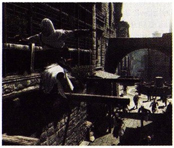


The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

With close to a hundred hours worth of content—like discovering and joining an assassin's guild, earning wealth and fame in a battle arena, unearthing magical talismans in dozens of dungeons, saving cash to purchase a house, getting bitten by a vampire, and completing a plethora of optional yet engrossing quests—*Oblivion* is worth trying even if you're not traditionally an RPG fan.

Ninja Gaiden Sigma

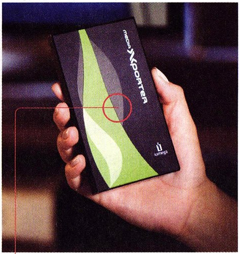
Hardcore action gamers wear *Ninja Gaiden* game completions as a badge of honor. The action is consistently spectacular, if punishing, and will test the mettle of the fastest, most expert button-mashers.



Assassin's Creed

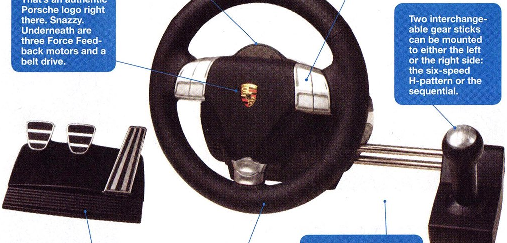
Whereas Snake hides in lockers and cardboard boxes, Altair disappears from the sight of the Knights Templar by sitting on benches and diving into haystacks. The stealth-based gameplay is reminiscent of the *Metal Gear* series, though Altair's weapon of choice is a blade, whereas Snake favors a tranquilizer gun.

PlayStation Digest HARDWARE



Stylish Storage

A storage space solution and a file converter all in one, Iomega's Media Xporter not only features 160GB of storage space in a sleek, flask-like container that's compatible with PC, Mac, PS3, and Xbox 360, but it also comes with free downloadable converter software (Prism Video Converter MX, that at the moment is only PC-compatible). The software lets you change the music, images, and video on your PC into PS3-friendly formats. The device is priced at $119.95, but we have one warning: to safeguard your unit (whether PC or PS3), you have to plug in both of the drive's USB connectors, so make sure you have two free USB outlets near each other before utilizing the Media Xporter.



You can install attachable lapwings or table clamps to the wheel, depending on your preferred gaming position.

The face, right, left, and D-pad buttons are camouflaged to preserve the wheel's aesthetic appeal.

That's an authentic Porsche logo right there. Snazzy. Underneath are three Force Feedback motors and a belt drive.

Two interchangeable gear sticks can be mounted to either the left or the right side: the six-speed H-pattern or the sequential.

The wireless pedals—gas, clutch, and soft-step brake—are lined with Velcro to minimize slippage. They come with batteries that supply 100-plus hours of gameplay time.

When you lean in and sniff, that luxury-new-car-yes-I'm-real-leather smell wafts into your nostrils.

No wire!—to the PS3, at least. You still need to connect the wheel to an outlet to supply energy for the rumble effects. (No battery option.)

The Leathery Scent of Luxury

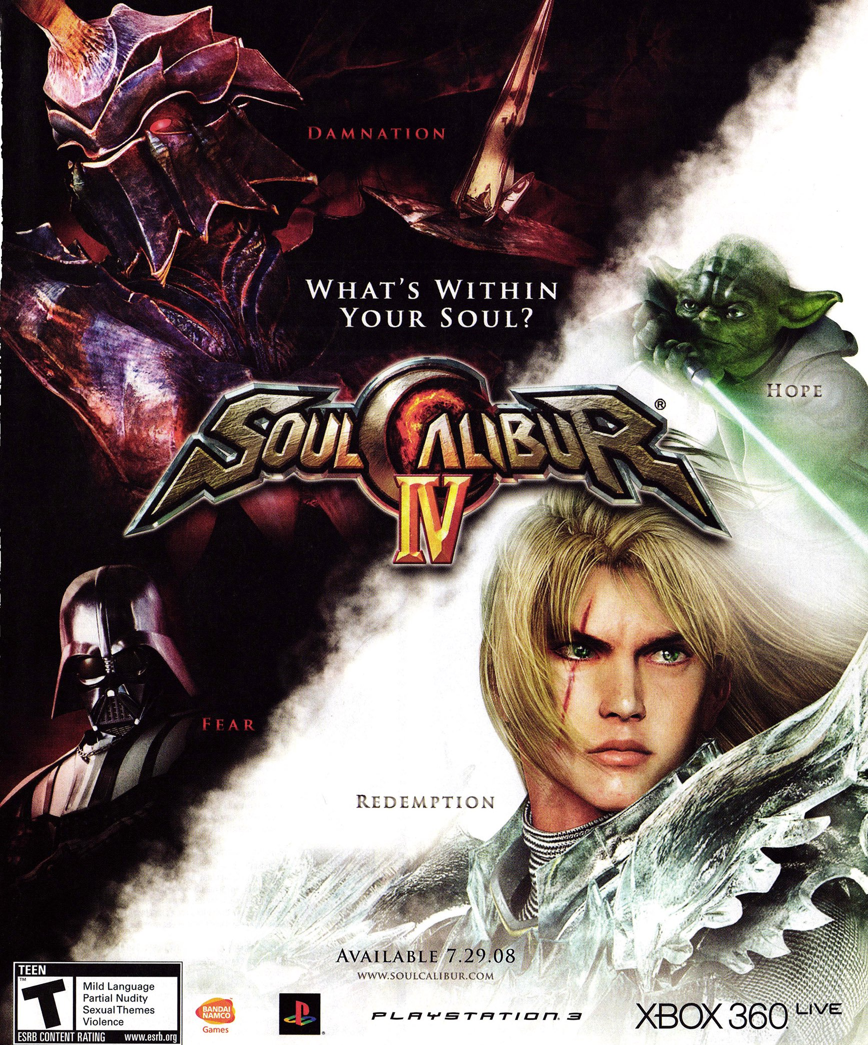
For 350 bucks, you could almost afford a 40GB PS3, but if you sleep in a bed of money, you presumably already own a PS3 of every SKU and color. You can therefore spend those 350 dollars on Fanatec's Porsche 911 Turbo Racing Wheel. Fanatec describes it as "an exact, licensed reproduction of a Porsche 911 leather steering wheel." We call it splurging this month's candy money to own one-percent of a car we'll never be able to afford. We'd love to be able to confirm the accuracy of the claim but we've never seen the inside of a Porsche, aside from that one juvenile GTA case that we... Never mind.

A Wheel for the Masses

At $99.99, Logitech's Driving Force Wireless wheel for the PS3 is a lot more affordable than the Fanatec one detailed above. Unlike the Logitech wheel we highlighted last month—the $149.99 Driving Force GT—this model doesn't include table clamps. Instead, the Driving Force Wireless targets the more relaxed, play-while-slouched-on-the-couch crowd and features an adjustable, expandable lap rest. It's backwards compatible with the PS2 and exhibits all the PlayStation buttons you need directly on the face of the wheel, though you can't make on-the-fly performance setting adjustments. The Driving Force Wireless is an option for the more casual racing audience; hardcore driving sim pros may find the wheel too limiting and not quite precise enough for their tastes.

Cross-Game and Backwards-Compatible Guitar? Bring It

We tried out the wireless Double Range V3 by The Ant Commandos this month. Not only does it work with all renditions of *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band,* it's also compatible with both the PS2 and the PS3. One guitar to rule them all, eh? Five additional buttons at the higher register of the guitar's neck lets you tap out rhythms like a professional guitarist. Tilting the guitar to activate star power does seem to induce a one to two second lag. However, the Double Range also comes with stickers and a special belt clip called the 360FLY that lets you spin the controller like ZZ Top... not that we would ever attempt such a "Hi, I'm desperate for attention" trick like that. Ahem.


DAMNATION
WHAT'S WITHIN YOUR SOUL?
HOPE
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FEAR
REDEMPTION
AVAILABLE 7.29.08
WWW.SOULCALIBUR.COM
TEEN
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Mild Language
Partial Nudity
Sexual Themes
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
BANDAI NAMCO Games
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360 LIVE

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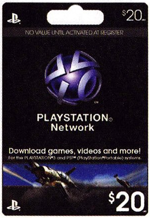
Babes (and studs) in Toyland

While you wait for a JRPG to finally be released on the PS3, these themed figurines and knick-knacks might ease your suffering. Okay, so the Alicia *Valkyria Chronicles* figure won't be out until September—and you'll even have to import her from Japan from an online retailer like Play-Asia.com or a local Japanese import store, at a hefty cost of $60 to $80—but the Square Enix toys are out now. The Sephiroth, Vincent, Yuffie, Red XII, and Cait Sith Play Arts are $24.99 each, and the full *Kingdom Hearts* five keyblade set is $34.99. You can order them from Square Enix's online site at www.square-enix-shop.com. Is it too early to start our holiday wish lists yet?

"BEEP, BEEP," GOES THE WORLD'S FASTEST COMPUTER

The world's fastest supercomputer, nicknamed "Roadrunner," recently broke the petaflop barrier, which means it can perform over a quadrillion (one thousand trillion, or 10 to the 15th power) calculations per second. That's two times as many as the world's previous fastest supercomputer.

How did it manage to accomplish this feat? With the help of the technology at the heart of the PS3! The Roadrunner was built with parts that might be sitting in your study right now, including 6,948 dual-core AMD Opteron chips and 12,960 Cell engines (the ones inside your PS3). Roadrunner's creators picked the PS3's Cell processors because the technology calculates events in real time. Scientists will be using the Roadrunner to perform climate and nuclear weapon simulations, which leaves us in awe of the PS3 technology's raw power. Just think of what the PS3 has in store for gamers a few years down the line.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For the PLAYSTATION®3 and PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) systems.
$20

THE PSN CARD'S QUIET ARRIVAL

PS3 owners in the U.S. have been clamoring for PSN cards since shortly after the system's launch. Now, finally, those precious cards—which let you purchase content on the PlayStation Network without needing a credit card—are available for purchase in $20 and $50 denominations. The bad news is that they're currently only available at Meijer and Pamida stores. Don't even recognize the names of those stores? Then you'll like the good news: as the summer continues, the cards will debut at various other retailers across the nation. Now you have no excuse not to buy *PixelJunk Monsters!*

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and absorbing in the world of entertainment this month...or eating.

Emerald Cocoa Roast Almonds | Food | $1.89 to $9.88
Funny story: A large tub of almonds has sat on Rob's desk for the past several months. Out of the blue the mailman delivers a batch of Emerald Cocoa Roast Almonds, a chocolate dust-layered nutty snack ideal for keeping gamers' hunger pangs at bay. Yum! Better yet, it's the first product sent in with the singular goal of being included in our Top 10 list. So here it is. Top billing.

D&D 4th Ed. Core Rulebook Gift Set | Dorks | $100 (less online)
Okay, so Rob already "came out" as a D&D dork in his Ed Note a couple issues ago. Now it's certifiable as not only has he bought the new 4th Edition books, but he's reading them through page by page in anticipation of getting a new game off the ground. Real table-top roleplaying with nary a console controller in sight.

Space Invaders Extreme Audio Cluster | Music | $25
Gary threatened to import this soundtrack after he got hooked on its peppy techno beats while reviewing the game last month. Well...he did. And now he's been listening to it nonstop throughout deadline week—through his speakers! The rest of the staff has since chipped in to buy him a set of headphones.

Ice Road Truckers | TV | Free
Season two of History Channel's coolest series is in full swing, and Gary can't help but have a man-crush on the greatest hero of all time: Alex Debogorski. Not only does he drive a big rig on the frickin' *OCEAN,* but he has 11 children and seven grandchildren. Can't get more manly than that!

Cuesta Rey Cigars | Not-cool-for-kids contraband | $5 to $8
Puffing down a quarter of a smooth, mellow cigar takes the edge off the day and puts Ken in the mood to watch a soccer match. Just what he need as he struggles to achieve match-ready fitness. "Thanks, Gary."

Bang&Olufsen Form-2 Headphones | Stuff | $99
The joys of fatherhood: sleepless nights, wiping bottoms and changing diapers, preschool politics, and Father's Day! Ken's hearing things he's never heard on songs he's listened to for years. He's either smoking something else besides cigars or its his new Dad day headphones. Plus, they came out of a vending machine at Macy's. Cool.

Companion Cube | We have no idea | Teresa's sanity
If you haven't played *Portal,* stop reading now. Teresa says that the Companion Cube came to her in a dream. Amidst fog and shadows, it moaned, "We were friends. Best friends! How could you?" Teresa has since scrawled images of the Cube on her desk, computer, window, carpet... She suspects GLaDOS is responsible. *Huh?*

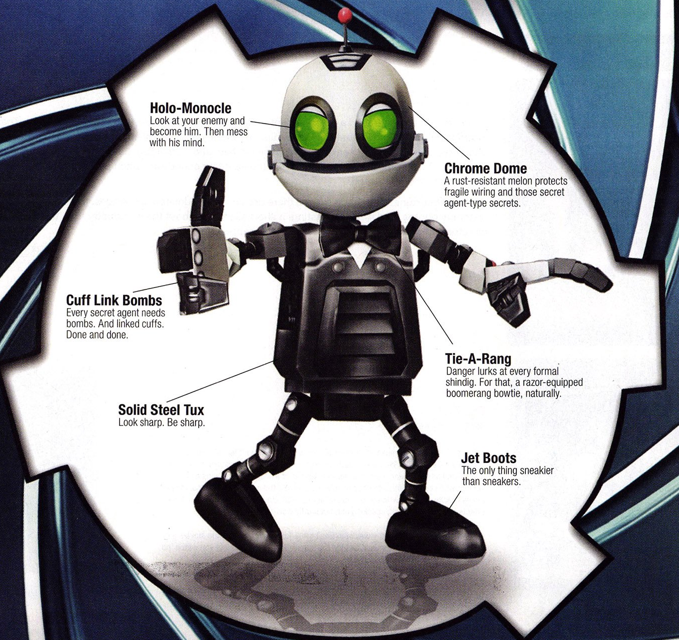
Air Hockey | Game | Quarters, even in a nickel arcade
As gamers, we sometimes get so caught up in the latest and greatest games that we forget all about the joys of analog gaming. Case in point: air hockey. Scott recently found himself in a nickel arcade with a very nice table and rediscovered just how much fun whacking a puck can be. Quit whacking your puck, Scott.

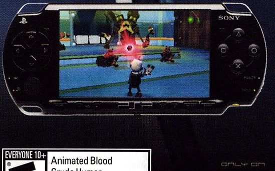
BOMB THE MUSIC INDUSTRY
O PIONEERS

Bomb the Music Industry! | Music | Free
Hey kids! Do you like music? Do you like free music? Scott says head on over to bombthemusicindustry.com and download yourself some high quality synth-punk! This band's been self-releasing its music for free on the Internet since long before Radiohead, and their tunes are as catchy as they come. Scott recommends you start with To Leave or Die in Long Island.

Kung Fu Panda | Movie | $10 per ticket; $30 concessions
Roger hasn't seen a grown-up movie in the theater since his kids were born, but *Kung Fu Panda* at least made the $60 theater outing less painful. Kung Fu action and Jack Black awesomeness equal two thumbs up. But the real entertainment began the following morning when his four-year-old son woke him by proclaiming, "Get ready to feel the thunder!" and proceeded to smash his butt into Daddy's face—over and over again.

THIS TIME THE SECRET AGENT *IS* THE GADGET.


Holo-Monocle
Look at your enemy and become him. Then mess with his mind.
Chrome Dome
A rust-resistant melon protects fragile wiring and those secret agent-type secrets.
Cuff Link Bombs
Every secret agent needs bombs. And linked cuffs. Done and done.
Tie-A-Rang
Danger lurks at every formal shindig. For that, a razor-equipped boomerang bowtie, naturally.
Solid Steel Tux
Look sharp. Be sharp.
Jet Boots
The only thing sneakier than sneakers.



SECRET AGENT CLANK™

EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

- Animated Blood
- Crude Humor
- Fantasy Violence
- Mild Suggestive Themes
- Tobacco Reference

ONLY ON PSP
PlayStation Portable

When the most difficult, secret and dangerous missions in the galaxy need to be solved, there's only one robot to turn to: Secret Agent Clank. Ratchet has been wrongfully jailed and it's up to you to free him and clear his name. Embark on a top-secret intergalactic rescue mission, using state-of-the-art gadgets to overcome challenges in stealth, puzzle-solving and hand-to-hand combat. You'll need to use everything you've got. Literally.

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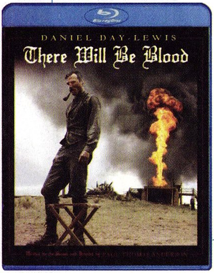
Blu-ray Central

I...watch...your...Blu-ray! I watch it up!

This month: awful comedies, campy '60s action, middling horror, a truly great drama, and some fantastic TV to boot!

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH



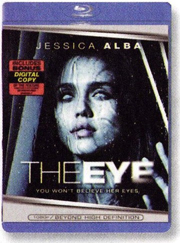
There Will Be Blood

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | A character study of a complex, determined, and ruthless late 19th century oil baron, *There Will Be Blood* is unlike any movie that comes to mind in recent years. Full of harsh landscapes and even harsher characters, this is a gritty, realistic, and involving tale, and Daniel Day-Lewis' performance is particularly amazing. The picture is generally beautiful; the haunting soundtrack pitch perfect, and the overall audio is exceptional, if understated.

| EXTRAS | Unfortunately light on extras, there are only a few deleted sequences, the trailers, a montage of historical photos, and most interesting, a short silent film about the oil industry from the '20s. The lack of director and cast commentary is especially disappointing.

MOVIES	★★★★★
EXTRAS	★★


Blu-ray Disc
JESSICA ALBA
INCLUDES BONUS DIGITAL COPY
THE EYE
YOU WON'T BELIEVE HER EYES
1080P / BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION

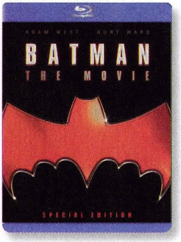
The Eye

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Yet another remake of an Asian horror flick, *The Eye* isn't terrible, but it's certainly not scary. It looks great—both the picture quality and the visuals of the movie itself—and has excellent audio, and Jessica Alba does a solid job portraying a blind woman who can suddenly see dead people. Yet, despite the promising premise, the plot doesn't really do much with the set-up and some of the dialogue is absurd, even if the effects are cool. It's worth checking out, but hardly worth a purchase.

| EXTRAS | There's little in the way of extras here—just some short promo movies and deleted scenes. It does, however, include the bonus digital copy that lets you watch the movie on a range of handheld devices.

MOVIES	★★½
EXTRAS	★★



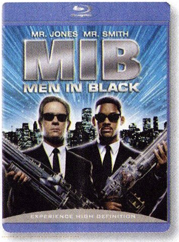
Batman the Movie

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | A true relic of the '60s, *Batman the Movie* is probably better left to nostalgia. It's hilariously stupid, overly and intentionally campy, and almost unbearably bad. Yet, for all that, there's a distinct charm of a bygone era here, and for lovers of true camp, this is HD gold. The picture definitely looks old, but the colors are still vivid and this is definitely the best Adam West has ever looked!

| EXTRAS | Plenty of background featurettes provide Bat-love for fans, including two commentary tracks. As much fun as commentary from Adam West and Burt Ward should have been, however, the reality is much drier and less animated than fans would hope. There are plenty of interesting tidbits spilled by the dynamic duo on the show and the movie, yet mostly they just laugh at how ludicrous the movie is and complain about how uncomfortable the tights were.

MOVIES	★★½
EXTRAS	★★★½



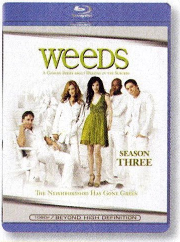
Men In Black

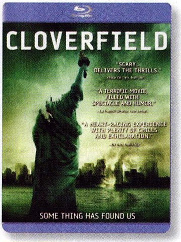
PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** PG-13

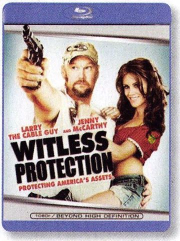
| MOVIE | *Men in Black* has finally hit HD, and is quickly on the road to classic status. This sci-fi comedy packs in great laughs and action, with topnotch effects and performances, and is worth re-collecting for fans. That said, while the outdoor and bright scenes tend to look great, many of the darker indoor scenes are disappointingly fuzzy.

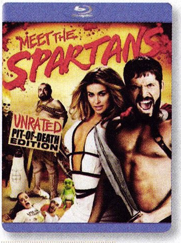
| EXTRAS | Although there are quite a few standard definition making-of bits, the extras for this HD debut are still disappointingly light and rehashed from previous DVD versions. The lack of director and crew commentary is disappointing.

MOVIES	★★★★
EXTRAS	★★½






LARRY THE CABLE GUY AND JENNY McCARTHY
WITLESS PROTECTION
PROTECTING AMERICA'S ASSETS
1080p BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION



Weeds Season 3

PRICE: $39.97 **RATED:** NOT RATED

| MOVIE | In case you missed it, Showtime has quietly developed a lock on the best shows on TV. *Dexter, Californication,* and especially *Weeds,* offer more entertainment, great characters, and plots than anything on the main networks. *Weeds* is also one of the few shows where every season is on Blu-ray. The show follows the trials and tribulations of a suddenly-single soccer mom struggling to sell weed to make ends meet in a housing development. *Weeds* is everything *Desperate Housewives* wishes it could be—funny, sexy, dramatic, and riveting all in about 24 minutes an episode.

| EXTRAS | Several of the episodes have commentary, featurettes on the ever-changing vocals of the theme song, and several other shorts for fans of the show.

MOVIES	★★★★½
EXTRAS	★★★

Cloverfield

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | A giant monster movie told from the perspective of a small camcorder screen, *Cloverfield* isn't recommended for anyone who got sick during the *Bourne* movies. As a monster flick, it's pretty good, but hampered by its own concept—since the perspective is always on rather extraneous young adult characters, any grand climax is nearly impossible. It's not a feel-good movie either, but definitely worth a rental for fans of the genre or those just looking for something different.

| EXTRAS | Quite a lot of extras here; the special investigation mode is especially interesting and provides a lot more background on the characters and the monster's origins. The commentary track is informative as well, if a bit dry, and there are several shorts on the making of the movie and the visual effects, in addition to some deleted scenes. It's also nice that most of the extras are in hi-def.

MOVIES	★★★
EXTRAS	★★★★

Witless Protection

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Larry the Cable Guy might have a thriving career in redneck humor, but if this vacuous so-called comedy is any indication, he needs to be kept as far away from the movies as possible. The jokes are flat, predictable, and awful. The plot is inane and nonsensical, and the movie is, on the whole, painfully bad.

| EXTRAS | There are a reasonable amount of extras—gags, making of bits, deleted and alternate scenes, though no commentary—but who cares when the movie is so horrible? Even the picture quality is generally subpar, as if Lionsgate knew the movie was crap and wasn't going to waste resources trying to raise the quality bar.

MOVIES	★
EXTRAS	★★

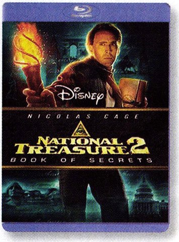
Meet the Spartans

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | Appallingly bad and actually embarrassing to watch, *Meet the Spartans* is the sort of movie that really lets you know you've wasted 83 minutes of life that you'll never get back. The writing is the worst kind of sophomoric, revolving around ridiculous over-appreciation of the same three gags. Even the gags that almost work are ruined by repetition and stupidity.

| EXTRAS | The cast and crew commentary sounds like a drunken gang who, sadly, seem to have little idea just what a debacle they've helped create. There are a couple surprisingly bad games included, and several making-of and gag shorts. While most parody movies are simply cheap gags and fart jokes, *Meet the Spartans* surpasses the usual mediocrity to reach new depths of awfulness.

MOVIES	★
EXTRAS	★★



National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | Moviegoers got caught up in the modern-day adventure that was the original *National Treasure,* despite its plot holes and *Da Vinci Code* styling. So it's no surprise Cage and friends are back for more. Thankfully, *Book of Secrets* isn't quite the blatant rip-off of Dan Brown's novel template. It's still full of inane plot elements, improbable uses of historical characters, and an endless parade of Cage jokes. Still, if you want a tolerable Saturday night popcorn flick, *National Treasure 2* provides plenty of laughs—some of which are even intentional.

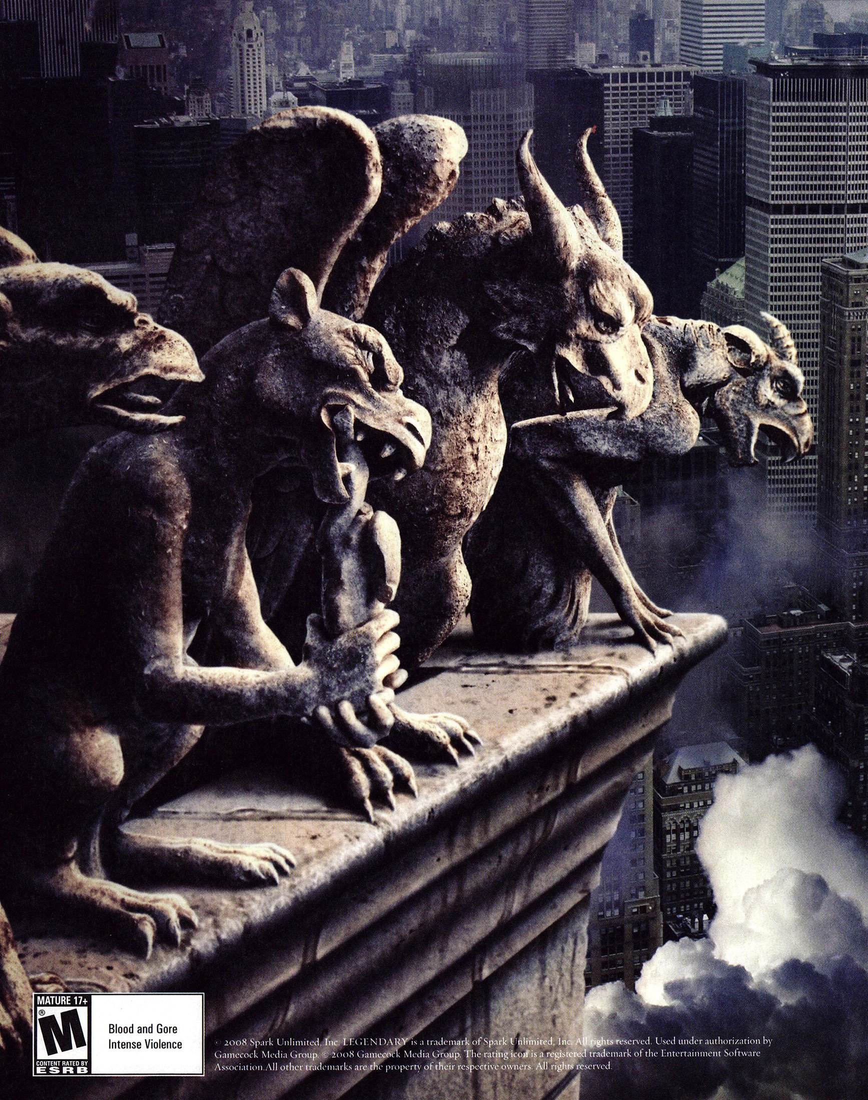
| EXTRAS | Disney has packed an impressive amount of supplemental material on the disc, including a couple exclusives for the Blu-ray version—a fact or fiction featurette about some of the plot elements and two additional deleted scenes. The commentary with director Jon Turteltaub and Jon Voight is good, if generally slow, and there's an array of other shorts, deleted scenes, and information on the backdrop elements in the movie.

MOVIES	★★★
EXTRAS	★★★★

Blu-ray Gets Classy: Criterion Is Onboard!

For decades now, the Criterion Collection has been synonymous with top-tier extras and superb remastering of classic cinema. They recently announced their first batch of Blu-ray goodness that will not only take advantage of glorious high definition sound and audio and include all the supplemental content found in the DVD versions, but will also retail for the same price as the DVD versions. Admittedly, Criterion's releases aren't exactly cheap, but for true fans, their releases are something to crow about. Here's the list of titles that will be hitting shelves starting this October:

The Third Man
Bottle Rocket
Chungking Express
The Man Who Fell to Earth
The Last Emperor
El Norte
The 400 Blows
Gimme Shelter
The Complete Monterey Pop
Contempt
Walkabout
For All Mankind
The Wages of Fear



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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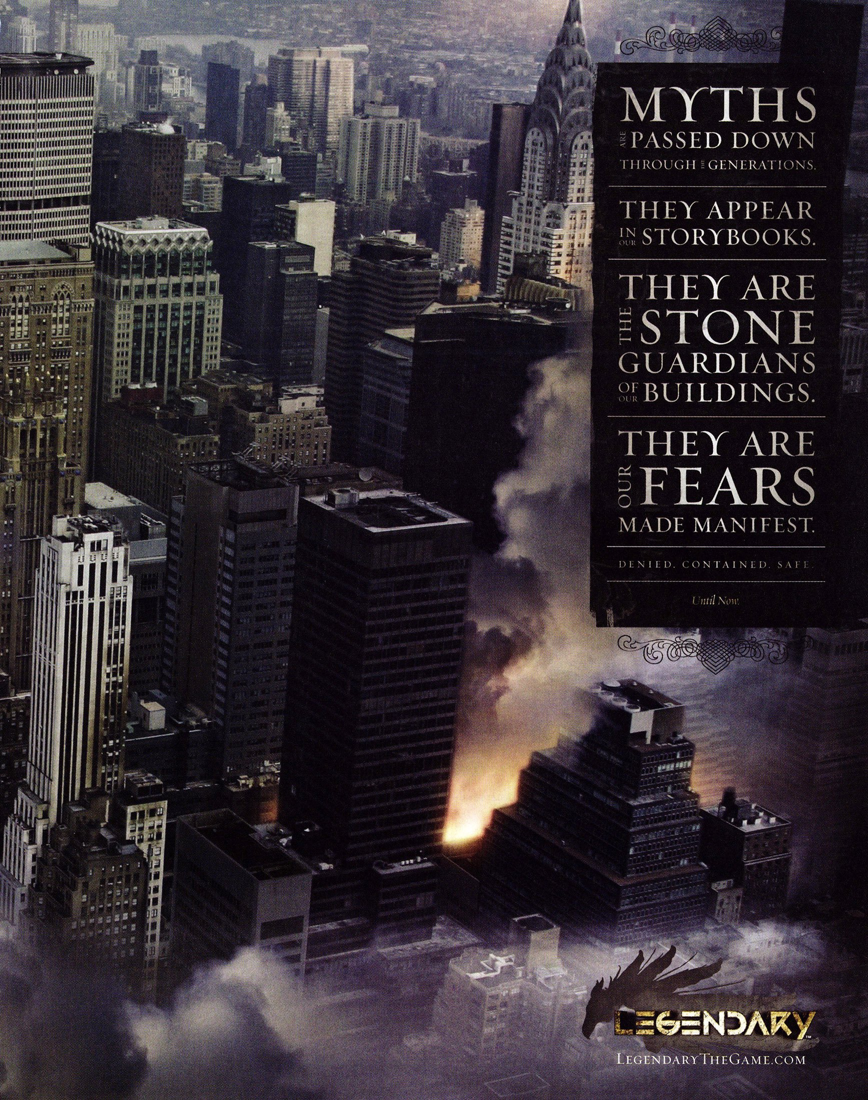
MYTHS
ARE PASSED DOWN
THROUGH THE GENERATIONS.
THEY APPEAR
IN OUR STORYBOOKS.
THEY ARE
THE STONE
GUARDIANS
OF OUR BUILDINGS.
THEY ARE
OUR FEARS
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DENIED. CONTAINED. SAFE.
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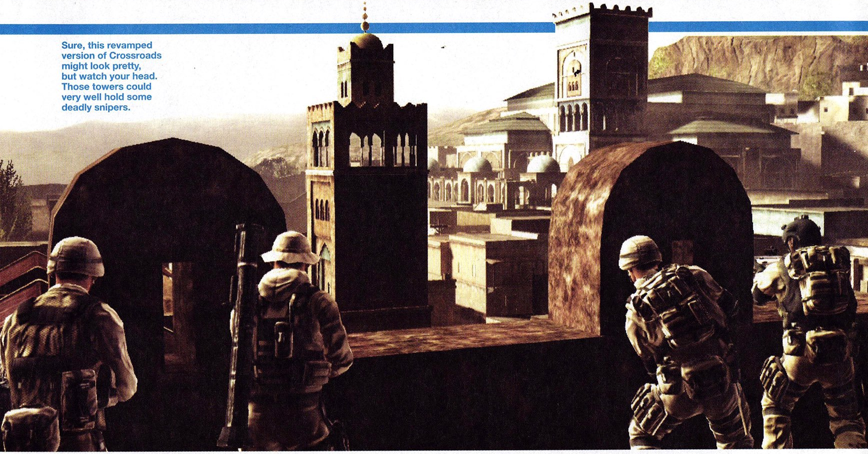


Sure, this revamped version of Crossroads might look pretty, but watch your head. Those towers could very well hold some deadly snipers.

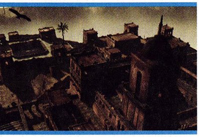
PS3 | P

SOCOM: Confrontation

Hands-On Preview

Screw sports, start a SOCOM team!

PS3 GENRE: Online shooter AVAILABLE: October PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Slant Six

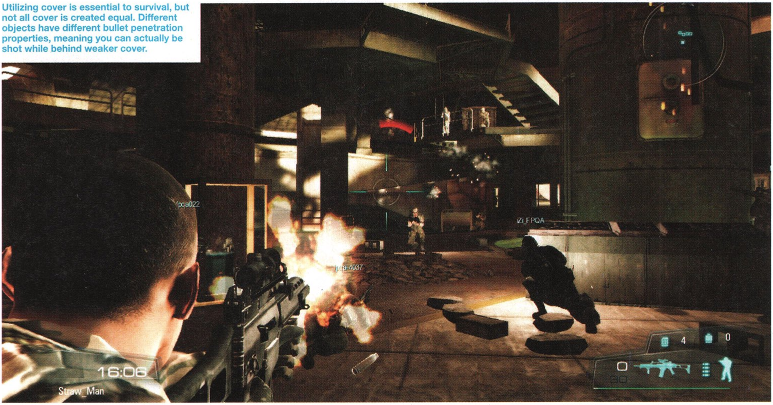


Making a multiplayer-only game is inherently risky. You have to overcome the perception that the lack of a single-player component constitutes it being only half a game. But *Warhawk* helped prove that the concept could be successful, critically and commercially, and the *SOCOM* franchise has always done well online—with an active community keeping *SOCOM: Combined Assault* at the top of the PS2's most-played list to this day—making it an ideal candidate for surviving the online-only treatment. After spending a little time actually playing *SOCOM: Confrontation*, I'm already pretty convinced that it won't just survive the treatment, it will thrive because of it.

Uncle SOCOM wants you!

A big part of what makes *Confrontation* exciting (for me, anyway) is the incredibly deep support system, which—in keeping with the game's emphasis on team tactics—focuses mainly on clans. Clan creation is built right into the game and requires only a PSN account, so anyone can quickly and painlessly create a clan and invite others to join. Once you've got your clan up and running, you'll be able to participate in free weekly regional and global tournaments, which can accommodate up to 256 teams. Brackets will be automatically organized by the system, meaning all you have to do is sign-up and show up. Of course, you can always challenge a particular clan by consulting the ladder to find a suitable opponent and sending them an invite, setting everything from the date and time to the maps and match types.

The game also provides you with a myriad of ways to customize your



Utilizing cover is essential to survival, but not all cover is created equal. Different objects have different bullet penetration properties, meaning you can actually be shot while behind weaker cover.

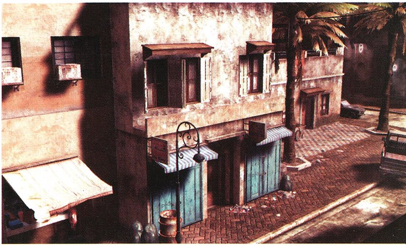
clan. When you first create a clan, you'll choose from any of five real-world international Special Forces teams (which dictates your basic uniform and the unique weapon that will be available to you), and from there, you can adjust the colors and create and wear custom badges to give your team its own unique look. Plus, you'll earn badges that reflect your military rank, which goes up the more you play and is separate from your skill ranking. Your rank doesn't necessarily grant you any authority within the clan, though, since it's up to the clan leader to delegate power.

Best of all, every clan will have its own unique webpage on SOCOM.com where the team can stay organized, using a private message board to communicate and a clan-specific calendar to keep track of upcoming matches and special events. Clans can also use the website to search for and recruit new players, since those without clans can tag themselves as free agents. Thanks to SOCOM.com, you can literally be a gun for hire. But if all this clan nonsense sounds like too much of a commitment, the game also offers a regular old party system so you can just play with your friends.

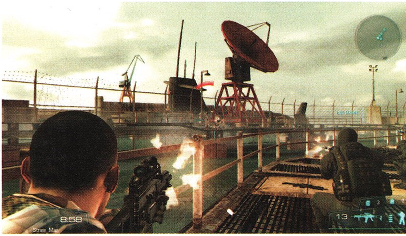
Don't get left in the "dust"

Of course, all the support features in the world don't mean a thing if the game isn't fun to play, and nothing sucks the fun out of a match faster than poor level design (well, maybe connection problems, but that's often not the game's fault). Wisely, Slant Six has decided to give itself a little insurance in this area by bringing back three of the franchise's most beloved maps: Crossroads, Frost Fire, and Desert Glory. All three are faithful recreations of the originals—though Crossroads has been expanded to accommodate more players. This trio is joined by four brand-new maps set in North Africa, lending a similar aesthetic despite their diverse environments.

All seven maps offer both day and nighttime settings and support all seven match types: Team Suppression, Breach, Demolition, Escort, Extract, Control, and Elimination. The four new maps and Crossroads have different configurations for eight-, 16-, and 32-player matches, while the two remaining classic maps still offer eight- and 16-player configurations. No longer will four-on-four matches devolve into ridiculous games of hide-and-seek! Plus, the maps are more like real-world environments than simple obstacle courses: towers can be climbed, buildings can be entered, and rooftops can be camped. Each map even has one or two environmental elements that can be blown



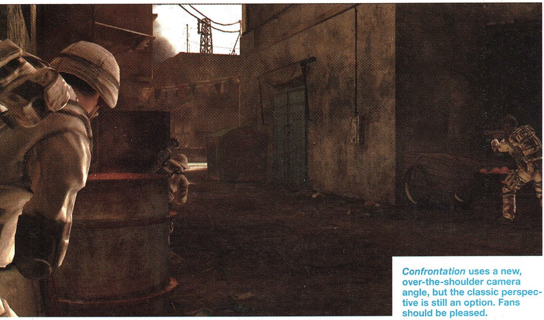
Buildings aren't just there for decoration. You'll actually be able to enter most of them, allowing for some intense close-quarters shootouts.



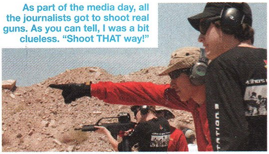
This is the outer portion of the all new Quarantine map. Obviously, these catwalks don't offer much cover, so you'll have to find more creative ways to enter the center building. I suggest swimming for it.

Previous *SOCOM* games have been promote

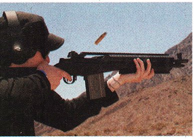
web-based reality series that put gamers through a Navy SEAL training program. Look up "*SOCOM* Hell Week" on Youtube to check it out.



Confrontation uses a new, over-the-shoulder camera angle, but the classic perspective is still an option. Fans should be pleased.



As part of the media day, all the journalists got to shoot real guns. As you can tell, I was a bit clueless. "Shoot THAT way!"



I definitely appreciate *Confrontation's* sound effects much more now. They sound exactly like the real thing.

PS3 | P

Confrontation's bluetooth headset, despite having been developed specifically for the game, is being adopted as the official headset of the PS3. Among its more notable features: high quality audio recording capability and the all-important mute button.

up in order to block off old routes and create new ones.

Unfortunately, I didn't witness any massive explosions, but I did explore four of the maps: classics Crossroads and Frost Fire, and newcomers Quarantine and Kasbah. Needless to say, the classic maps were looking as sharp as ever, so let's skip right ahead to the new ones: Quarantine plays like a war-torn power plant, with crumbling concrete walls and dangling wires. The map is symmetrical, with two small satellite buildings connected to a central dome building by a series of catwalks suspended over a body of water (which you can actually swim in). To be honest, I had a hard time finding a logical flow to the action here and constantly felt out of place. Kasbah, on the other hand, is brilliant. This middle eastern-looking fortress offers a huge variety of different routes. From ramparts to dungeons, it has it all, and as a recovering *Counter-Strike* addict, I felt right at home.

Give the people what they want

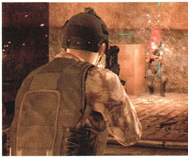
Clans, maps, great. But what about the gameplay? Well, if you like shooters, you're probably going to like *Confrontation* because it doesn't stray too far from the familiar. You really can't hold that against the game, though. What really matters is whether or not the game executes the tried-and-true formula competently enough to deliver the experience that fans expect, and in that regard, *Confrontation* is rock solid.

From the moment I picked up the controller, I felt comfortable with game. Movement felt natural and the action was fast-paced in a fun way, with just a tinge of arcade flavor amid the visual realism. The graphics were remarkably sharp for such an early build—lighting effects and textures were especially impressive—and the sound was astonishingly realistic. The controls were solid and responsive, and I was overjoyed to hear that they're fully customizable, as is your armor and equipment setup—which offers 37 firearms, 15 weapons attachments (up to two per weapon), and 10 auxiliary items. Heavier armor and items both made me move noticeably slower, which adds a tangible layer of strategy.

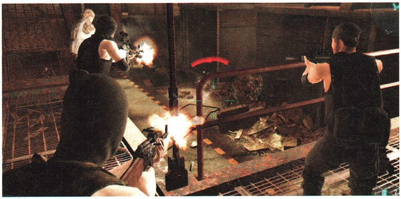
The only thing I wasn't crazy about was the Sixaxis cover system, which lets you lean, duck, or stretch depending on which way you move the controller. The lean technique was useful, but I found it awkward to try to do anything while ducking or stretching just because of the way I had to hold the controller. But overall, the game did a good job of getting out of the way and letting my competitive spirit take over.

Considering both the depth of *SOCOM: Confrontation's* community features and the accessibility of its gameplay, I'd guess that it's positioning itself as the next game of choice for serious, competitive shooter fans. And while that's a lofty goal, I can tell you this much: Clan PTOM will be formed and ready for action on day one.

Scott Butterworth



After taking down a foe, you can stand over his body and tap X to dance.



Shell casings persist after a firefight, which could help you locate enemies.

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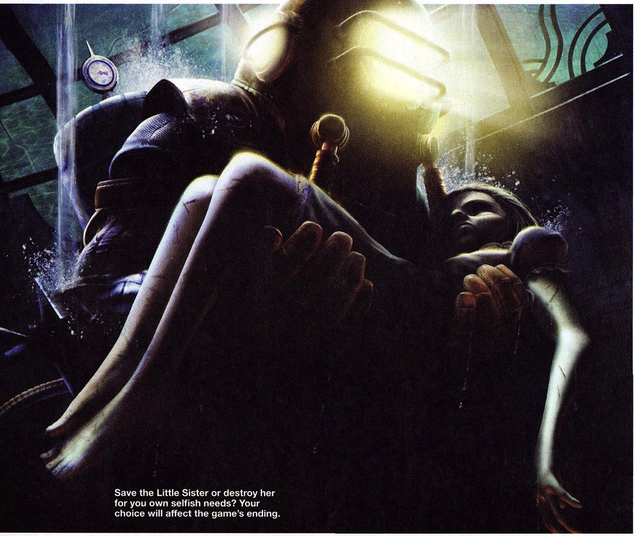


Save the Little Sister or destroy her for you own selfish needs? Your choice will affect the game's ending.

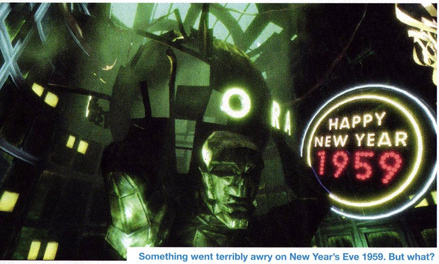
PS3 | P |

BioShock

Hands-On Preview

Enter the Rapture

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: 2K Marin, 2K Boston, 2K Australia, Digital Extremes



Something went terribly awry on New Year's Eve 1959. But what?

It's been eight days since I first visited Rapture, and since then I've been plagued by a persistent, nagging compulsion. I want to return—no, I *need* to go back to that murky, sodden ruin of an underwater city. Never mind that peril lurks around every corner in a once shining utopia where the flame of one man's grandiose dream has been extinguished, replaced by a festering, deadly hostility. I've got a taste of what lies ahead in Rapture, and that's all I need to be hooked.

But perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself. Some of you might not even know where Rapture is—and more to the point, what I'm doing there. Many of you have never played the original Xbox 360 or PC version of *BioShock*, lauded upon its release as one of the greatest interactive achievements of 2007.

Into the deep

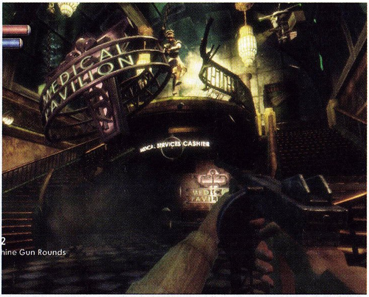
My journey begins with a plane crash somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. Amidst the wreckage and flames, I spot a glimmer of hope: the top of a tower in the distance, peeking above the water. I swim toward the glowing spire, climb some stairs, then enter. Inside, I notice the elaborate art deco trappings—everything is suffused with that distinct modernist style that signified man's aspirations, a bombastic celebration of technology and progress. This is a world that's at once retro and futuristic, ahead of its time yet blighted with decay.

I enter a pod, which carries me down into the submerged city. From the game's first-person perspective, I turn to see the ruins of a city all around me: skyscrapers pierce the watery depths, with teeming sea life swimming throughout, reclaiming what was once theirs. Soon enough we stop, and through the thick glass I see a horrifyingly mutated humanoid—what I'd soon learn is a "splicer," the last remnants of the citizenry of Rapture, grotesquely deformed from the overuse of genetic enhancements. The splicer attacks the pod but is quickly dispatched outside of my vision by means unknown. Meanwhile, I've been contacted by a mysterious voice via a radio within the pod: a man named Atlas is offering to help me in return for a favor. He will remain my aural companion throughout my adventure, offering guidance and direction while I pursue my dual goals of escaping Rapture and helping Atlas find his family.

A wrench, a plasmid, a pistol

Although I was only able to play what amounted to the first few "levels" in this open-world game, I got a real taste for both the depth of the storytelling and the range of the gameplay.

The former is everywhere…and nowhere. This may be a linear tale with a specific story to be told, but the narrative isn't forced upon you; rather, it unfolds around you—from snippets shared by Atlas, through diary logs left behind from long-passed inhabitants (which you don't have to listen to), in conversations overheard in the distance, via visual scenarios unfolding in front of you. In fact, the first time I saw the disturbing duo of a lumbering Big Daddy and an eerie Little Sister, I was behind a glass wall, watching their interaction unfold before me like a twisted voyeur who couldn't turn away from something naughty.

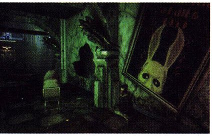


Ah, the Medical Pavilion. What better place to test your skills with a Tommy Gun?

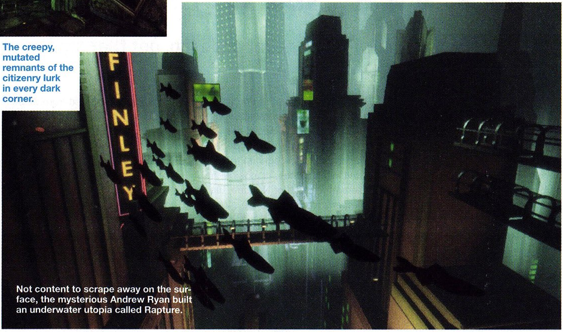
Meanwhile, the gameplay may seem typical of an FPS—move around in first-person perspective and blast anything that moves—yet it balances the core gameplay that FPS aficionados crave with the ease-of-control that might suit those seeking adventure over action. I was only able to try out a mere sample of the weaponry—a wrench, one plasmid, and a pistol—but everything just felt…right. When I injected that first plasmid (a genetic power-up in a handy syringe), I immediately began to shock baddies with electro bolts like a champ, following that up with a swift bash with my wrench for a sickly satisfying one-two punch.

And then my visit was over. After a too-brief foray into Rapture, including a quick test of the new Survivor mode (see sidebar), I was escorted out of the offices of 2K Marin. ("Look straight ahead," prompted the PR guy while rushing me through the cubicle farm, ensuring I didn't get a glimpse of some other top-secret project being developed by the same studio. Hrm…what could that be?) I had yet to sample any of the other plasmids the game offers. I had yet to battle a Big Daddy. I had yet to face the central moral conundrum of the game: Do you sacrifice these childlike Little Sisters to extract more "ADAM" from them? Or do you rescue them, thus depriving yourself of a significant portion of the special substance you need to survive, evolve, and escape?

No matter. I've been touched by Rapture and now I'm hooked. Although my limited exposure isn't enough for me to definitively state *BioShock* is as special as everyone claims, I'm open to the possibility of greatness ahead. Whatever the case, I will be back, lost in Rapture, soon enough. Gary Steiman



The creepy, mutated remnants of the citizenry lurk in every dark corner.



Not content to scrape away on the surface, the mysterious Andrew Ryan built an underwater utopia called Rapture.

PS3 Challenge

Ask the *BioShock* team what's new for the PS3 release, and they get a bit prickly. "We are absolutely not revisionists," sniffs Jordan Thomas, creative director. "*BioShock* exists, and we want to make sure the content that's there comes across experientially to any audience that might ever pick it up. We're not altering that core experience."

But dig a bit deeper and you'll find a few upgrades. First, all the downloadable content that was ever made available for the 360 version will ship with the PS3 release. That includes extra plasmids and gene tonics; a widescreen mode; and the option to turn off the Vita-Chambers (respawn points). "We really think of this as the 'complete' version," notes executive producer Alyssa Finley. "The things we put in later for the 360 version are here from the beginning."

But perhaps the biggest change of all is the new Survivor mode, a deviously challenging difficulty level that's not only meant to make encounters tougher but to change the way you play the game.

"*BioShock* supports a bunch of different play styles, and you can make it through on any of the other difficulty modes by specializing in one play style and ignoring the others," Thomas explains. "On Survivor, you need to pay attention to all the possible things in a level and make very active use of all of them or you *will* die. It encourages broad mastery."

In other words, the game has a lot of depth built in, but it's easy to overlook that depth. In Survivor mode, you can no longer simply unload all your ammo into a Big Daddy, for example, and expect to win. "You have to start being more clever, using the stuff that we encouraged but didn't force in the other difficulty modes," says lead level designer JP LeBreton. "You have to start using some of the manipulation plasmids, getting some of the other enemies angry at the Big Daddy so they pile into him, or hacking things so they start attacking the Big Daddy—basically turning the entire world against enemies, using every dirty trick you know."

The need to explore the levels has another benefit. "Because Survivor makes you slow down, you can stop and smell the roses a little more," LeBreton smiles, "even if you're holding your guts in with one hand as you're smelling those roses."

The flamethrower will scar the earth. And, as in this scene, the enemy.

PS3 | P

Call of Duty:

World at War

Fight Together

No FPS worth its salt can overlook the essential multiplayer component, and *Call of Duty: World at War* is no exception. New to the proceedings is a "squads" mechanic in the competitive modes, where designated squad leaders will be able to employ strategies like setting waypoints on the overhead map. Even more exciting is the co-op mode, which will support two players on a single screen or four players online. Vehicles will play a big role in both of these arenas. The maps will be bigger than ever, and a new "spawn influencer" system makes sure you don't end up spawning in the sights of a sniper or the path of a rocket launcher.

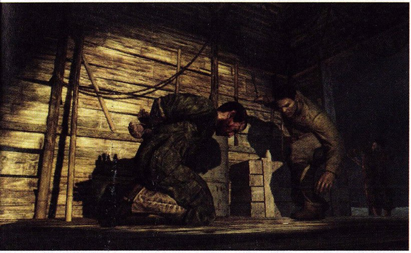
Welcome back to the war that never ends (no, not that one)

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Shooter PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Treyarch

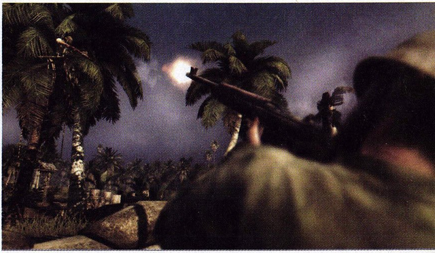
Ah, World War II. The war that any red-blooded American—even the most committed of pacifists among us—could really, y'know, get behind. The war without moral ambiguity, where right and wrong was black and white. But a war that, quite frankly, has been done to *death* (and back again, several times) in videogame form.

After countless *Medals of Honors, Brothers In Arms,* and *Calls of Duties,* what's really left to explore? In Activision's eyes, the answer lay in the Pacific theater. *Call of Duty: World at War* marks the first time the venerable series has attempted to depict the conflict that pitted the Imperial Japanese forces against those of the United States, alongside the Commonwealth of Nations, the Netherlands, and France. "We really wanted to do the end of the war," says Treyarch studio head Mark Lamia.

What distinguishes the war in the Pacific? Well, the Japanese fought differently: As Lamia expounds, their culture, environment, and beliefs were significantly different from those of European forces, which made for a distinct combat style. They were a mighty fighting force, capable of taking out much larger battalions with a combination of creative tactics (interlocking lines of defense, digging into spider holes and perching in trees, waiting for an ambush for days on end) and sheer determination passed down through the Bushido code. "They'd come at you with their last breath," says the game's military advisor Hank Keirsey. Anything short, he says,



The first mission opens with a rather dark and disturbing torture session. Can't we all just get along?



Shooting enemies out of trees is a key tactical maneuver for safely moving the flamethrower forward on the battlefront.

and they would have disgraced their families.

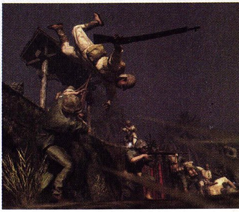
Plan of attack

Our demonstration begins in a Japanese prisoner camp, where we watch one of our fellow American soldiers getting tortured with such accessories as cigarette butts and switchblades. We then end up fighting our way through the jungle, going up against the new, more intelligent enemy. It's an intense battle that makes you slink deeper into the grass (which, incidentally, actually moves as you push through it this time around). Shoot an enemy up in a tree and he'll likely hurtle down on a rope, as Japanese soldiers would often tie themselves in to make sure they wouldn't tumble out should they fall asleep. Throughout the jungle, log traps and other perils await, making every step an intense test of your skills.

While it's being developed by Treyarch, the studio behind *CoD3* (as well as all of the Activision *Spider-Man* movie titles), the game is running on Infinity Ward's impressive *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* engine. It also marks the first time Treyarch has had proper time and focus to make the *Call of Duty* title it's capable of, according to its creators; *CoD3,* in particular, had a 10-month development cycle, required the team to create its own engine, spanned five platforms, two generations (PS2 and PS3), and was a launch title on both PS3 and Wii. By comparison, *World at War* has been in development for two years, uses a pre-existing (and inarguably awesome) engine as its starting point, and will be next-gen-only. This freedom has allowed the team to redouble its design efforts, all the way from the extensive pre-production research to the time necessary to actually imbue the engine with more technical capabilities and refinement.

Feel the burn

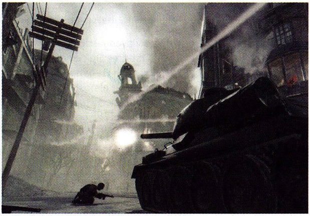
The use of fire figures big. The flamethrower is a particularly effective weapon against spider holes and tree-perched enemies, so Treyarch focused on pushing the engine to do a realistic job of handling it. The result is an incredibly dynamic flame effect, which actually spreads on an ever-changing wind vector and leaves visible scars on the earth. (Of course, getting this weapon within range will also require quite a bit of strategy; carrying a 70-pound weapon and tank of propane through enemy lines—especially with snipers in the trees—is no mean feat.) Water is also much more realistic and interactive than it was in *CoD4;* boats leave wakes, and when you're forced underwater, bullets will change their velocities and trajectories as they hit the surface of the ocean. Likewise, the environments are more destructible, à la *Battlefield: Bad Company.* Not only does this add to the sense of immersion and interactivity, it actually affects gameplay: Get stuck in a wooden building with a group of soldiers, for example, and you may just be able to create a backdoor escape with a little help from your friendly rifle.



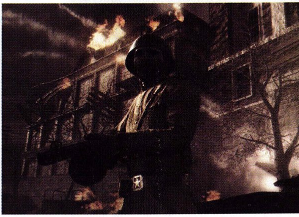
When the enemy won't even contemplate surrendering, you can count on the fighting be exceptionally brutal.

It should be noted that as the game deals with the end of the war, it will also include a host of missions set in the European Theater. You'll be fighting in the Russian army as you push deep into Germany; we witnessed a sequence in which we followed a Russian sniper through a crumbling Berlin on the verge of defeat, with the narrative gracefully woven into the run-and-gun (and escape) gameplay. If the developer can bring everything together with as much refinement as we've seen thus far, expect to enlist for yet another call of duty.

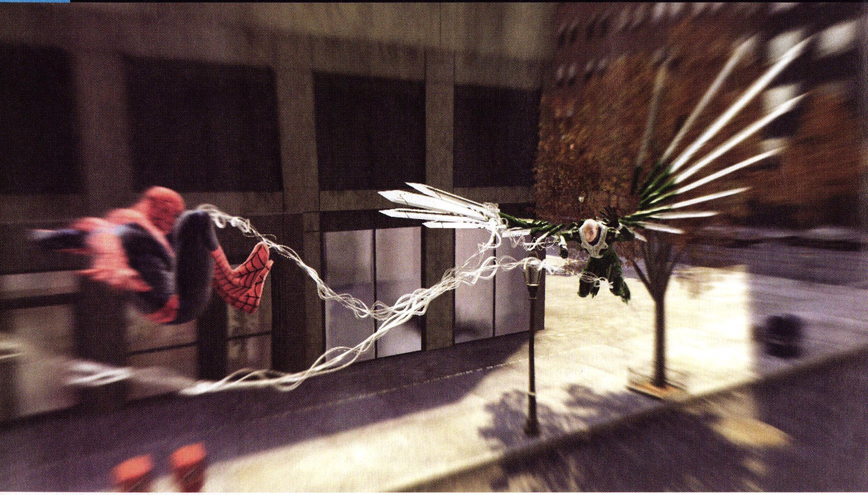
Evan Shamoon



Eastern Front combat makes an appearance in *World at War.* The Russians are coming and they don't look happy.



Incredibly destructible environments should make for the most realistic *Call of Duty* game yet.



From battling bosses to swinging around the city, Shaba's key word for the game, "fluidity," seems appropriate.

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

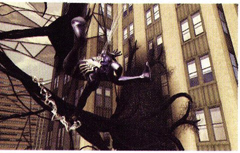
First Look Preview

Do whatever a spider can...finally

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Activision **DEVELOPER:** Shaba Games/Treyarch

PS3 | P

Master the game's controls to sustain spectacular aerial battles.



Play as hero or anti-hero: the choice is yours.

Despite the veritable smorgasbord of self-titled games that Spider-Man already has on the market, everyone's favorite web-slinger is still aiming for the perfect interactive game experience. The upcoming *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* reprises the tried-and-true open world action/adventure formula of previous *Spider-Man* titles but, for the first time in this generation of consoles, is completely unrelated to the movies. This opens up new avenues for creativity, and first-time Spidey developer Shaba Games—who, prior to this, worked almost exclusively on action sports games like *Tony Hawk's Project 8* and *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX*—aims and expects to capitalize on the opportunity.

The game's story, for instance, is grounded firmly in the comic book universe for a change, boasting an impressive roster of both enemies and allies including classic characters like Kingpin, Vulture, Luke Cage, and a few that have never appeared in a *Spider-Man* game before (though Shaba hasn't revealed them yet). But the game isn't rehashing old comic plotlines—it features an original, standalone story courtesy of Marvel comic book writer Brian Reed (see sidebar).

The trouble starts when Spidey's arch-nemesis Venom discovers that he can infect the citizens of Manhattan with

Venom never has trouble finding a place to park.

the alien symbiote that grants him his powers, effectively turning them into evil, mindless Venom-clones. At first, no one realizes what's happening, but chaos quickly spreads and with it, panic. As the number of symbiote clones steadily rises, government agency S.H.I.E.L.D. decides to quarantine the city, leaving Spider-Man to deal with Venom's minions and rescue the uninfected. The only problem is, he too has been infected.

As a result of Spider-Man's infection, you can don the traditional red and blue suit or the aggression-engendering black suit, creating a duality that plays an essential part in both the plotline and gameplay. Depending on which suit you favor, civilians will start to treat you with adoration or fear, and other characters will become more or less likely to affirm allegiance to you. The alliances you form—coupled with a few game-altering decisions—will determine how the story branches and, ultimately, which of the game's endings you see.

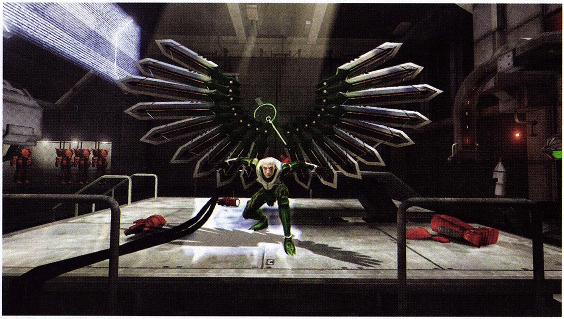
Each suit allows a specific approach to combat: wear the red and blue suit for superior quickness and agility with an increased focus on web attacks, while the black suit inspires brutality and aggression for beating the crap out of enemies at close range. However, you don't truly have to choose between the two since you can instantly swap suits at any time. So with a little practice, you'll be able to use to the two sets of abilities in a synergy of two butt-kicking combat styles.

The combat in *Web of Shadows* also features an extensive combo system that encourages you to master the game's controls. It actually works in much the same manner as an action sports game, which makes a great deal of sense considering Shaba's extensive background in the genre.

Basically, you continuously string moves together for as many attacks as possible without pause. Execute it correctly and you can beat an enemy senseless without ever touching the ground (which we saw developers do during a battle against Vulture). As you rack up combos, you'll earn experience points that can be used to upgrade your moves or unlock new ones from any of several different categories—such as ranged attacks for the black suit or aerial attacks for the traditional suit—allowing you to further customize your fighting style.

All this action takes place in the air and on the walls as well as on the ground, with seamless transitions between all three. And if that sounds like a confusing, vertigo-inducing mess, don't fear: you've got your "Spidey-sense." This tool sends out a pulse that highlights enemies and allies in sky-high colored beams, making them easy to track whether you're swinging through the air or fighting on the ground. It also initiates the combat camera, which dynamically adjusts to keep an enemy in frame even when you send him flying, lending the action a cinematic feel in the process.

We've seen a few disappointing superhero games in recent months (we're looking at you, *Iron Man* and *Hulk*). But *Web of Shadows* not only looks great in action but is also supported by some genuinely good design ideas. We've got our fingers crossed that this one finally does the web-head justice. Scott Butterworth



As you can see from Vulture's blade-wings, certain aspects of the source material have been re-imagined to some degree.

The Writer Unmasked

Brian Reed, the man tasked with writing *Web of Shadow's* story, has worked on such Marvel comics as *Spider-Man: Secret Invasion* and *Spider-Woman: Origin*. Here's what he had to say about writing for the game:

PTOM: Do you feel that the one-off nature of this game offers you greater creative freedom than comic book writing?

BR: You're free in different ways in each medium. In comics I can write "the planet explodes" and someone draws that. In games you can't just throw down anything you think of because there are so many other pieces of development that fall into place and you have to be mindful of those. It's one thing to see pictures of a super hero battling an army of bad guys; it's quite another thing to *be* the super hero in that fight.

In what other ways does writing this story differ from writing a comic book?

BR: With the game you have to be ready for contingency plans. What if the player turns left when they need to go right? What if they attack the person they're supposed to be defending? You don't have any of that in comics, because you're the storyteller and the character does what you say.

How faithful to the source material are the characters and story?

BR: One of my biggest jobs on a game like this is to make sure Spider-Man sounds and acts like Spider-Man. Since it's an all-new story, players will be experiencing events they've never seen before, but there are going to be a lot of familiar faces amongst the game characters. I think fans of the comics, as well as the new legion of Spidey fans who've only seen the movies, will find something they know and enjoy.

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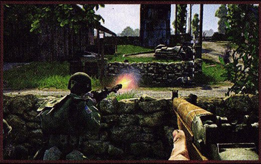

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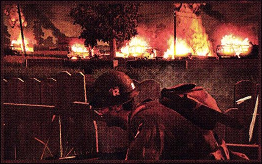

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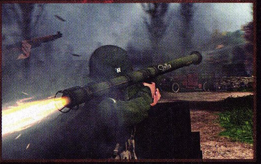

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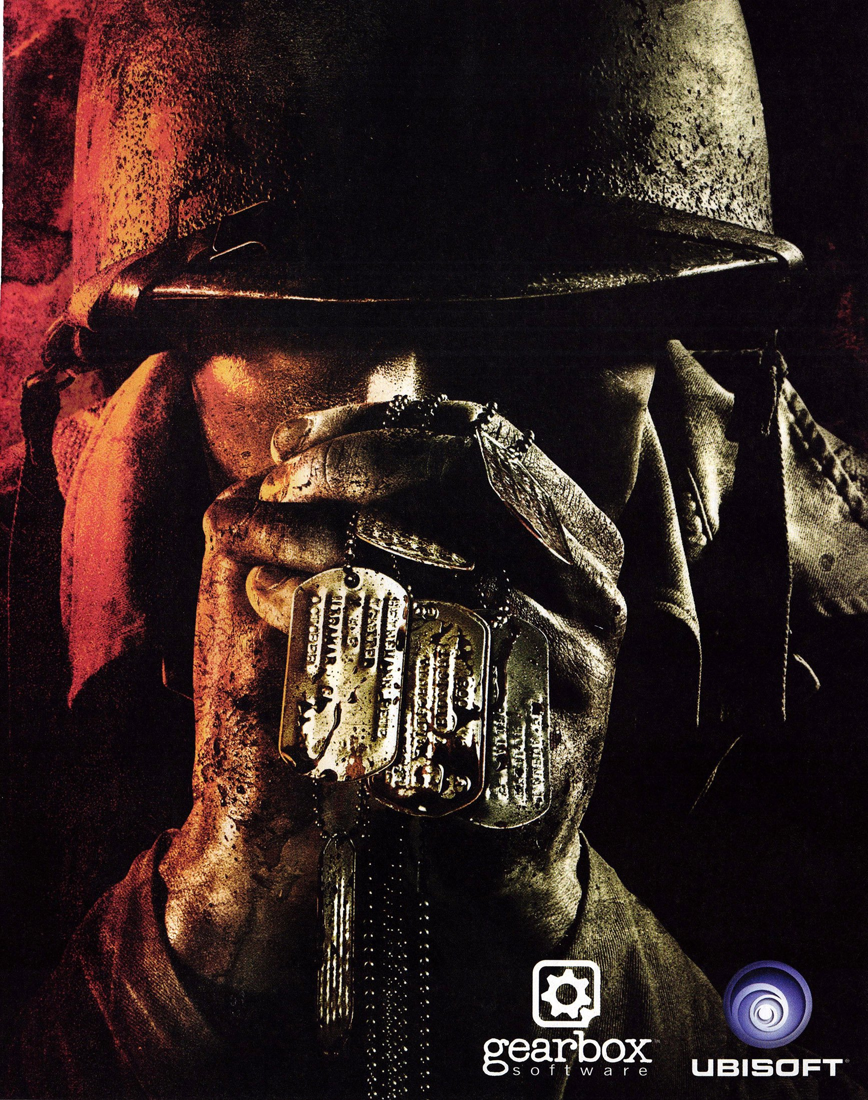

gearbox software
UBISOFT

N+

First Look Preview

Proof positive that ninjas beat pirates every time

PSP **AVAILABLE:** August **GENRE:** Platformer **PUBLISHER:** Atari **DEVELOPER:** Silverbirch Studios

Left. Right. Jump. Three simple movements controlled by three little buttons, yet when they're packaged with a brutal physics engine and an environment riddled with soaring precipices and objects that kill on contact, you have the Internet Flash sensation *N,* short for "The Way of the Ninja," a game that earned accolades from critics and praise from PC and Mac gamers worldwide.

The concept behind *N* is deceptively simple. Lead an agile ninja past an assortment of obstacles—lasers, falling blocks, deadly heights, mines—to an exit somewhere on the stage. The twist? The ninja has a 90-second lifespan, and you have to guide him through a five-stage chunk before his life runs out. And these aren't breezy, play-through-all-five-with-enough-time-left-over-to-grab-a-cup-of-coffee-and-a-baguette-mmm-carbs type of stages; these are oh-my-god-why-can't-I-get-past-the-first-ledge-on-the-first-level-without-falling-to-my-death-I-really-want-to-pull-out-all-my-hair-I-need-carbs type of stages.

Thanks to the sensitive physics engine even simple actions like changing directions while running have a realistic delay; complex movements like wall jumping, wall sliding, and falling (yes, falling) are like mastering art forms. Fortunately, collecting gold blocks adds a few precious seconds to your lifespan. Emerging victorious through even some of the innocuous-looking beginning stages takes a degree of stamina and willpower akin to climbing Mt. Everest, but the rush of endorphins when the ninja finally reaches those exit doors is what compels *N* fans to attempt the next grueling stage.

e*N*hancements

So that's *N.* What's *N+?* The short answer is that it's the PSP version of the Flash game. The more accurate answer is that it's *N* with 350 brand new single-player levels specifically designed for the PSP's widescreen format by the game's original creators, with a sharper graphical style appropriate for the handheld and code written completely from the ground up (since Flash code won't directly work with the PSP). It's *N,* enhanced.

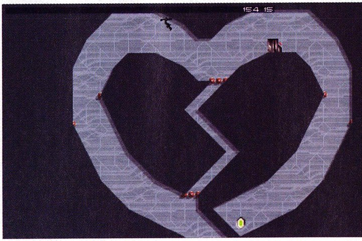
According to David Geudelekian, one of *N+'s* producers and a long-time *N* fan, the trick was to make *N's* core concept of merciless, twitch-based platforming appeal to a whole new audience of gamers while still retaining enough of the game's heart to appease its original fans. To that end, some of *N's* elements will be made user-friendlier, such as a less linear level-unlocking system. You'll also have a choice between the upgraded, colorful Plus graphics and the stark, original Pure ones (see above.)

Rounding out the grueling single-player levels are a level editor, some multiplayer components, and a hearty collection of unlockables. Underestimating these seemingly "normal" inclusions would be as immense a mistake as overestimating your *Ratchet & Clank*-honed platforming skills; in fact, *N+'s* ambition level pushes the PSP beyond the familiar and into the revolutionary.

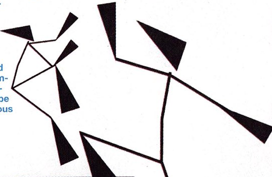
Teresa Dun

HiddeN Secrets

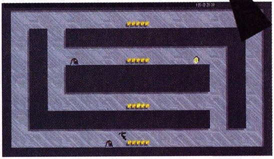
Gold doesn't just extend your lifespan. Gather enough of it and you'll earn items from the unlockables menus. The usual assortment of colored ninja skins, level packs (not accounted for in the advertised 350), and multiplayer level packs are present, of course. But there's also a mysteriously labeled "Atari Bonus" that won't be unlocked no matter how much gold you collect. So how do you unlock it? No one knows yet…but Atari will be leaking hints as the game gets nearer and nearer to its release date. What exactly is in the Atari Bonus? Producer Geudelekian wouldn't say, but he promised it would be a bundle worth opening. What a tease!



A level in *N+* doesn't have to be complex to work—a broken heart is a painful thing, in real life, sure, but also in this game. There's always tricky (in this case, mine-filled) terrain to navigate.



These two ninja laugh and dance because *N* newcomers have no idea how profoundly brutalized they'll be by this seemingly innocuous itty-bitty little game.



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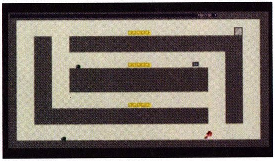

PURE

Levels in *N+* tend to be more horizontal than the blockier, lower-res levels of *N,* but you can play *N+* in either the new revamped graphics or in the original Flash-based graphics.

Piqued your interest? Whet your appetitce on the free Flash version of *N* available at www.thewayoftheninja.org..

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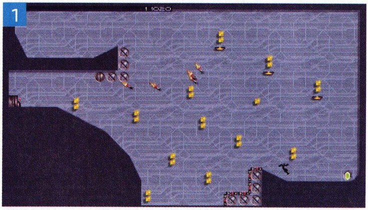

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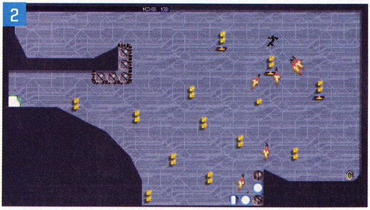

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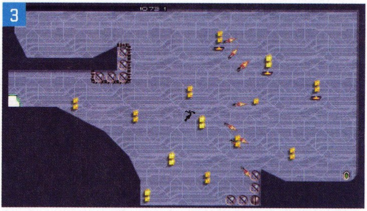

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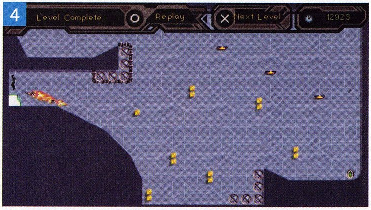
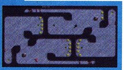
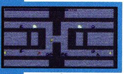


Think the level above looks easy? Keep in mind that the homing missiles spawn from two different points and they follow your every move as you hop your way across the stage. Furthermore, you have to be careful how you fall (Box 3). If that ninja doesn't calculate his angle just right, he'll find himself a bloody pulp. Of course, if he wall jumps off the slope, he can make it to the exit safely (Box 4), though those missiles will be hounding him the entire time.

INteractive Play

Misery loves company, and *N+* will certainly torture—in a good way. So you'll want to grab a friend and jump into the game's four multiplayer modes. The multiplayer will be limited to two-player ad hoc, but each mode will feature 20 new levels designed specifically for that mode's mechanics.





CO-OP: Progress through specially designed co-op levels with a friend. Luckily, only one of you has to actually get to the exit door.

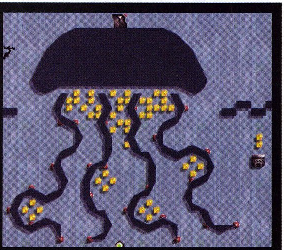
TAG: Who would've thought this simple schoolyard game would translate so well to a platforming game? But our hands-on experience proves that it does, thanks to the environmental threats—homing missiles, land mines, etc.—that spice up the gameplay.

RACE: Get from Point A to Point B before the other guy, overcoming the plethora of obstacles between the two points.

BLITZ: Dash to collect gold before your competitor does in this timed greed-frenzy. You lose a few seconds every time you die.

Don't forget that users can create levels tailored to each multiplayer mode, too. As an added touch, Geudelekian mentions a feature called Playlisting that lets you choose 10 or so multiplayer levels and string them together to create a sequence, minimizing the need to return to the menu.

INfinite Creativity



We've seen level editors before, but this is the first time we've seen a level editor packaged into a PSP game that lets you create your own levels that you can then upload to an external server for other *N+* players to download, play, and rate. Here's how the process will work:

1. REGISTER AN ACCOUNT One per PSP, and the whole process will supposedly take place on your PSP.

2. CREATE A LEVEL The whole level will be displayed on the screen. Press the left shoulder-button to access a menu for tiles and objects.

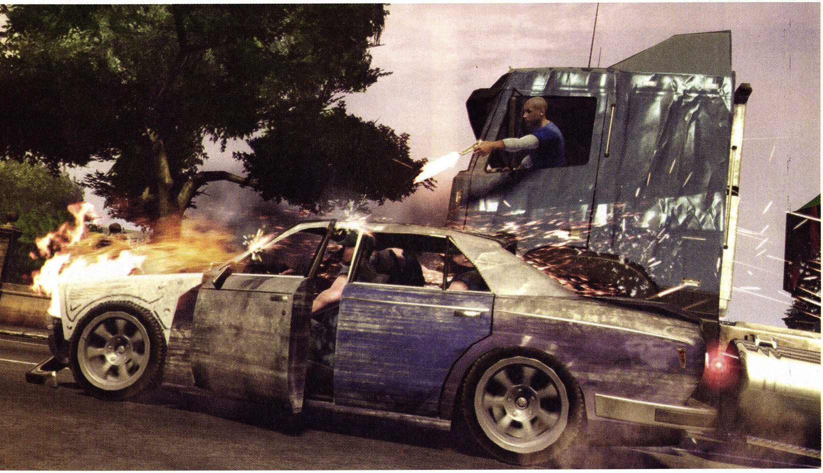
3. UPLOAD YOUR LEVEL To prevent the servers from being spammed with giant phalluses and other terms of service-breaking materials, levels will sit on an inaccessible "purgatory" server until moderators have approved them. Expect updates either weekly or monthly.

4. DOWNLOAD USER-CREATED LEVELS To navigate the different levels available, you "flip" through them like a deck of cards.

5. RATE THE LEVEL Each registered account is granted one vote. Thus, levels will be rated by players and you can see how well your level fares against others.

Exclusive to the level editor is a new object called the Inertia Field—it won't be in any of the developer-created levels because it breaks authenticity (the developers wanted to stay true to the original game) but expect to see creative users utilizing the gravity-warping object.

If *N+*'s level editor process works as well as it sounds, the game's content will be virtually endless. This make-and-share concept is currently being implemented into plenty of PS3 titles; we're excited to see how it translates to the smallest member of the PlayStation family.



Given that the game takes place in an open world, you can ignore a mission's suggested route and still ultimately be successful.

Wheelman

Hands-On Preview

PS3 | P

The closest you can get to a car chase without ending up on the news

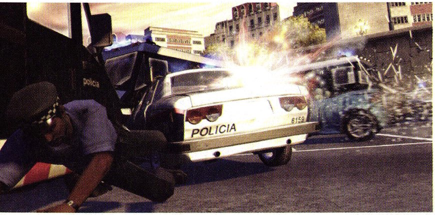
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Driving/Action **PUBLISHER:** Midway Games **DEVELOPER:** Midway Newcastle/Tigon Studios

As I played through *Wheelman's* first mission—a high-speed getaway following a botched robbery—several analogies raced through my head: *Burnout*-style gameplay in a *GTA* format; *Driver 2* without any pretense of realism; *The Fast and the Furious,* minus that whole street racing-as-cultural-phenomenon premise. In reality, none of these quite capture the true essence of the game, but I'm sure they give you a good idea of what it's all about: fast, destructive, and unapologetically arcade-style driving with a healthy flair for dramatic moments.

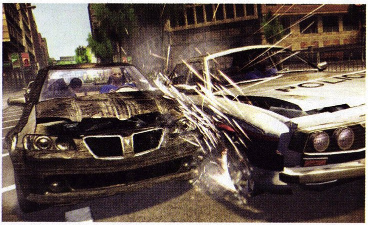
Not that it seems to matter while you're tearing through the streets at blinding speeds, but the game is set in an open world version of Barcelona. Many of the Catalan capital's most famous streets and landmarks are accurately recreated, but much of the city has been fictionalized for the sake of gameplay—complete with all kinds of jumps and shortcuts. You play as Vin Diesel-voiced undercover agent Milo Burik as he completes mostly driving-related tasks for various ethnic gangs over the course of 24 linear story missions and 105 mini-game side missions.

I say mostly driving-related because about 20-percent of the main story actually takes place on foot. This portion plays like your standard third-person shooter, offering basic cover and targeting systems to help you waste bad guys with assorted firearms. In my hands-on time, it felt solid but not spectacular and could prove to be the game's Achilles heel, though if the developers can manage to make the on-foot missions as exciting as the rest of the game, they could just as easily serve as a welcome change of pace.

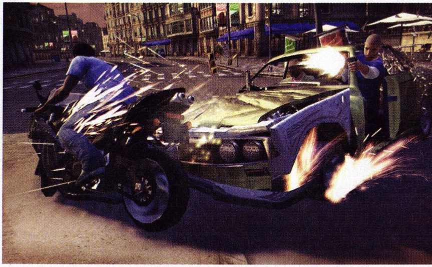
The other 80-percent is where *Wheelman* really shines: driving offers a great sense of speed and



Destruction is the name of the game in *Wheelman.* Why outrun your enemies when you can reduce their rides to scrap metal?



Flying debris adds a lot of chaotic action to the chase sequences. We'd wager that there's a fruit stand just waiting around the next corner.



The developer claims that, if you try hard enough, you'll be able to finish any mission with any vehicle, whether it be a motorcycle or a semi.

delightfully unrealistic handling that arcade racing fans like myself will love. No out-of-control fishtailing here, folks, just lots of speed. It's plenty destructive as well, letting you plow through just about everything besides thick trees, giant trucks, and pedestrians (the developer is aiming for a Teen rating). You can't be too reckless, though, since you can wreck your ride, and getting out to 'jack a new one kind of kills the momentum.

Probably the most unique aspect of the driving experience is the vehicle melee system. In *Wheelman,* the car itself is actually your best weapon. Flick the right analog stick at any enemy beside or in front of you and your car will essentially body check their vehicle, sending them careening into walls, oncoming traffic, whatever. You can also shoot tires, engines, or drivers by using an auto-aim drive-by mechanic or any of three special maneuvers.

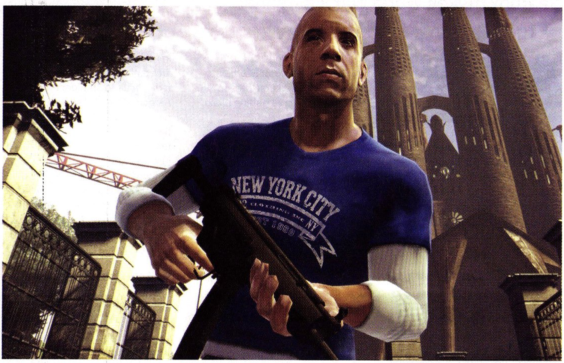
The more exciting of the two known moves (one is yet to be revealed) is the Cyclone, during which your vehicle automatically pulls a quick 180-degree rotation, giving you a slow-motion moment to fire at pursuers as you speed down the road in reverse, before whipping back around as if nothing ever happened. The other slow-mo maneuver, the Aim Shot, is similar to the Cyclone, but without the fancy spin move as it targets enemies in front of you. After test driving both moves, I can tell you that they're simple to execute, fit smoothly into the gameplay, and are pretty much the definition of badass.

The driving portion of the game also features a number of preset cinematic sequences that would be at home in any Hollywood action flick. The first mission, for instance, directed me to a narrow point on a freeway that was blocked by an accident, and the only way through was a ramp that consisted of a miraculously well-positioned flatbed truck. Hitting the ramp cued a brief cutscene that showed my car soaring through the air over the flaming hulks of what used to be cars. This was as exhilarating as you might expect, but also felt a bit contrived. So while these cinematic moments have a lot of potential and definitely reinforce the game's over-the-top Hollywood atmosphere, I hope their overall integration into the missions becomes more natural and seamless.

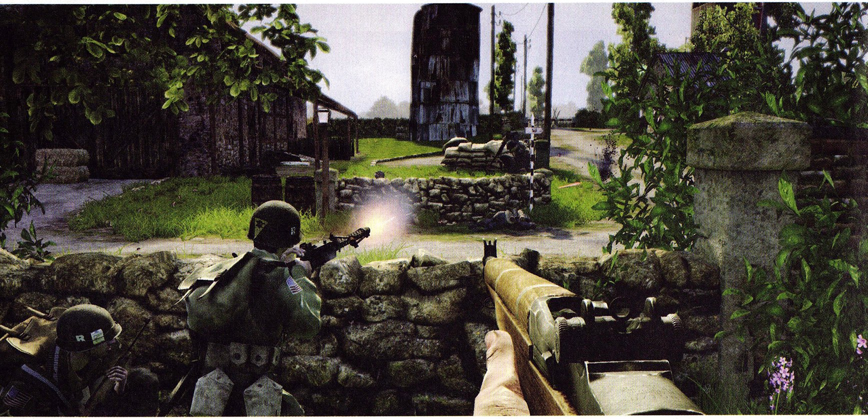
To be fair, the game also sports a few more contextually-based dramatic devices, like a dynamic slow-motion camera that kicks in when you catch a little air and the so-called "crash cams." Successfully rammed an enemy vehicle off a bridge? A super short dynamic cutscene will show it plunging into oblivion, rewarding you with a cinematic win sequence without taking you out of the action for too long.

Much like the great car chase movies that clearly inspired the game, *Wheelman* might not turn out to be particularly deep (especially considering its lack of multiplayer). But frankly, I don't think that it's trying to be or that it even needs to be. It's simply trying to provide you with a fun and exciting experience, and in that regard, it appears well on track.

Scott Butterworth



The La Sagrada Familia is one of many Barcelona landmarks that appear in the game. It's so heartwarming to see an American traveling abroad, expanding his worldview, bringing his machine gun...



An extra fireteam, deteriorating cover, and smarter AI give Gearbox's signature series a much-needed boost.

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

Hands-On Preview

PS3 | P

Gearbox makes World War II personal

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** August **GENRE:** First-person shooter **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft **DEVELOPER:** Gearbox Software

Although World War II first-person shooters have become all but passé over the last few years thanks to an over-saturated market, Gearbox Software's *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* might push your action buttons even if you think you're done with the period. And it's not through trickery or yet another layer of authenticity, mind you, but rather by an infusion of tactical gameplay into this year's model and a cast of true-to-life characters bonding in battle. Think HBO's *Band of Brothers* in a squad-based first-person shooter and you're getting close.

"Care for a Dutch souvenir, Nazi?"

Baptism of Fire

While visiting Ubisoft's San Francisco studio to play through the game's ninth mission, Baptism of Fire, the city of Eindhoven, Holland, is burning. The sky is auburn and ominous. Patches of flame spring from buildings and apartment windows, and exploding gas stations can be used as weapons by or against you. Baptism of Fire follows the Allies' assault on the German stronghold of Eindhoven, and the historical story makes for a great videogame setting.

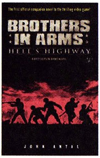
The Allies have pushed the Germans out of the city, but in retaliation the Luftwaffe has firebombed it, reducing its strategic value to smoldering ruins. As part of the 101st Airborne paratrooper unit during Operation Market Garden, you follow that tough stretch of World War II just after the Normandy landing, but well before the tide turned in the Allies' favor. To put it in the parlance of pop culture, if *Brothers in Arms* were three chapters, *Hell's Highway* is *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.*

The Little Things

Like many games transitioning to current generation systems, *Hell's Highway* doesn't dole out ambitious new gameplay elements. Instead, it improves on a ton of details. Following the first two games in the series, *Hell's Highway*

One for the Books

Gearbox Software employs its very own retired U.S. Army colonel and military adviser, John Antel, whose two upcoming books will coincide with the game's release. One of the books is fictional and the other is historical. The eponymous novel, to be released by publisher Random House on July 29th, focuses on soldiers fighting during two-and-half days of the Market Garden assault (and also serves as back story for Matt Baker). The historical book, to be published by Zenith Press in September, details the history of the 101st Airborne from beginning to end.


The first official companion novel to the thrilling video game!
BROTHERS IN ARMS
HELL'S HIGHWAY
JOHN ANTAL

Hell's Highway is actually a story-driven game focused on 101st Airborne paratrooper, Matt Baker.

Your measly rifle won't knock this sucker out. Best to flank it with your bazooka team and bring the element of surprise.

puts you, Sergeant Matt Baker, in charge of three fire teams (basic, mortar, and bazooka) controlled using the PS3's shoulder buttons and analog sticks. The iconic suppression system has returned with its clear visual cues—when the player is in danger, the circle above an enemy's head is completely red. As increasing amounts of firepower are delivered, the red winds down like a clock, until a gray color indicates you or your team can safely manuever. The sprint button works well in a pinch (but it's tough to turn while sprinting), and you can hop over fences or break through doors, which wasn't an option before. Grabbing cover is as easy as pressing a shoulder button, but unlike the previous games, protective cover such as fences and gates serve only as temporary protection. The newly added deformation system impacts combat decision-making and infuses the gameplay with additional layers of tension.

The newly implemented Dramatic Moments is perhaps the best use of the bullet-time effect we've seen in a long while. When you pull off a headshot or a destructive tearing-a-jaw-off-the-face sniper shot, the camera zooms in and you get to see the action in lovely hi-def slow motion. Gearbox's use of algorithmic physics imbues each shot to the enemy's body with a unique reaction, heightening the visceral impact.

Burning Decisions

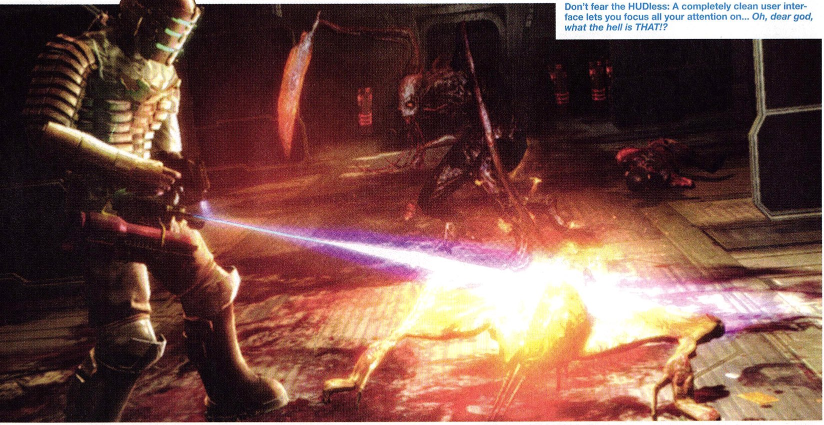
The level's explosive opening scenario pits you against enemies a hundred yards in front of a gas station. By flanking and delivering heavy barrage of firepower you'll push the Nazis back and with a few well-targeted shots at the right fill-up tanks, the gas station will explode, clearing a path. An assortment of scenarios can then transpire. Sometimes you'll surprise the enemy. At other times, you'll stumble past burned-out buildings into courtyards or marketplaces and the enemy ambushes you, packing heavy machine guns and assuredly outnumbering you. After the last checkpoint (which were all carefully and generously placed), the final objective finds you running after a U.S. soldier into a burning building as it's about to blow up, making any wrong decision a searing one.

Not only does *Hell's Highway* look far better than it did two years ago when it first debuted at E3 on a PC (thanks to extra development time, additional polish, and an assortment of new special effects), the gameplay has deepened as well. You now have to consider how each mission is laid out, and where—and how—you'll flank the enemy. In a sense, each new battle confrontation is like a constantly evolving puzzle. Add in a third fireteam, better AI, destructive cover, and different environments from farms to cities to warehouses, and *Hell's Highway*—one of the few thinking man's first-person shooters—just became yet more intriguing. Douglass C. Perry

Gearbox has worked hard to differentiate the environments and mission objectives from previous games in the series.

Brotherly Love x20

Gearbox Software President Randy Pitchford hasn't made a big deal of *Hell's Highway's* multiplayer component, and as of this writing, he hasn't shown it either. But it exists. While the game's main focus is the single-player campaign, the multiplayer game enables 20 people to play utilizing a limited set of modes featuring command features similar to the single-player game.



Don't fear the HUDless: A completely clean user interface lets you focus all your attention on... *Oh, dear god, what the hell is THAT!?*

Dead Space

Hands-On Preview

If their right tentacle offend thee, chop it off

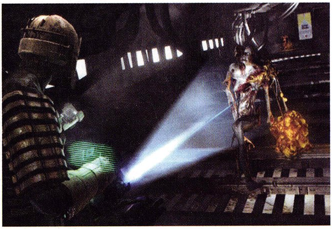
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Halloween **GENRE:** Horror action **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** EA Redwood Shores

PS3 | P

Electronic Arts' forthcoming dark, bloody science-fiction/horror game really gives a new, icky meaning to the phrase "disarming your enemies." You take the role of Isaac Clarke (now there's a subtle tip of the sci-fi space helmet for you), sent to investigate the fate of the *Ishimura*—a deep-space "planet cracker" ore-collection vessel, gone ominously radio-silent after some sort of incident.

The particularly hideous nature of the incident soon becomes clear, as you explore the dark, creepily depopulated corridors of the *Ishimura.* Freaky-looking alien creatures dubbed Necromorphs sporting too many limbs/tentacles—equally influenced by *John Carpenter's The Thing, Aliens* and *Event Horizon* in particular, as well as the works of H.P. Lovecraft in general—have evidently done away with most of the crew, and it's your job to explore the dimly-lit ship (occasionally without the benefits of suitable air-pressure or functioning artificial gravity).

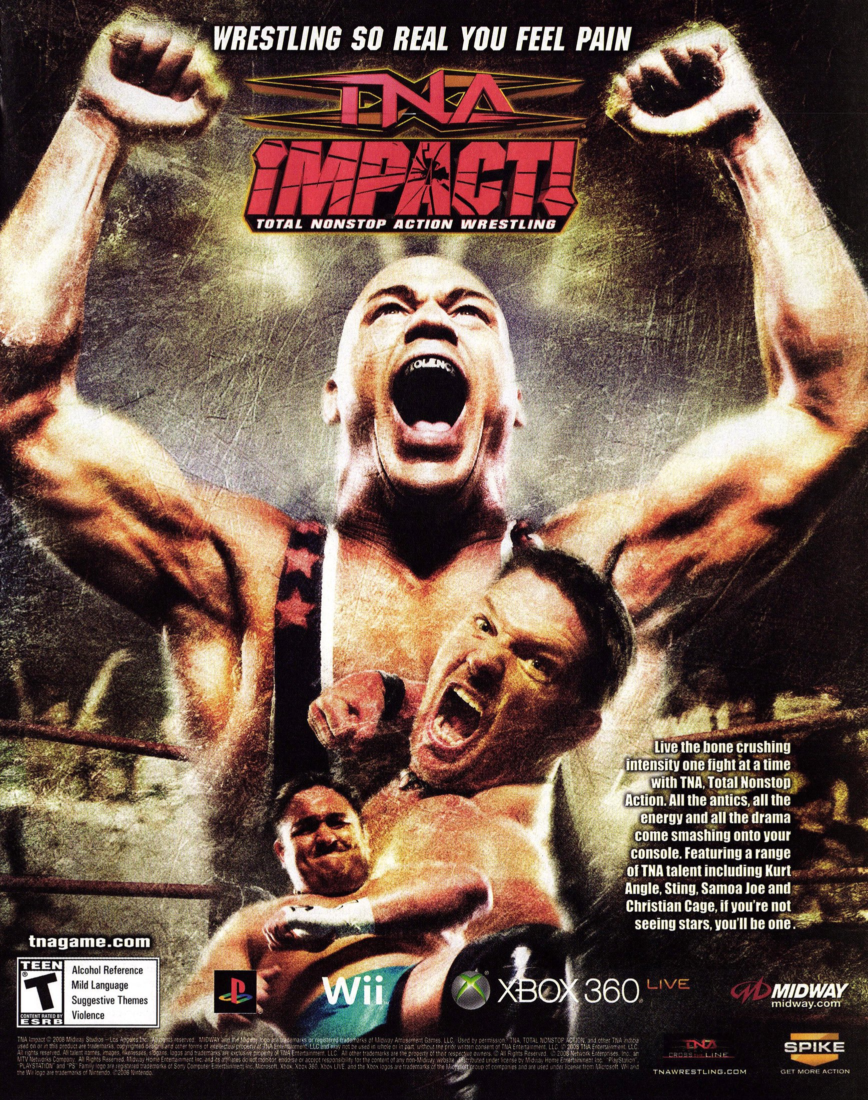
From what we experienced at EA's hands-on session, *Dead Space* seems obsessed with dismemberment—not simply for the considerable oh-yuck factor, but as a viable tactical option for defeating your enemies: If the Bad Thing scuttling down the corridor toward you is composed largely of legs, tentacles, and other ambulation-based protrusions, then hacking a bunch of them off seems like a good way of slowing it down. Traditional humanoid-oriented combat techniques like headshots may not only fail in such circumstances (no brain, no pain!); they may actually make things worse, by sending into a frenzy the thing that didn't have much practical use for its "head" in the first place. In fact, if one plump-bellied beast is shot in its ample gut, it'll split open, spewing formerly gestating, grotesque monstrosities scurrying across the floor in your direction. Nasty. It's really, really, delightfully, horrifically nasty, causing you to gasp, cringe, or close your eyes and shudder in the way that good horror can. Seriously, the game's producer cackled with a perverse glee when we skulked past what we thought was a dead "thing" only for it to jump in our faces, waking from its play-dead slumber, and causing the controller to nearly fly through the air.



Running into this thing is bad enough—and now the lights and artificial gravity are cutting out, too. Oh, joy.

Dead Space also offers the relatively unique mechanic of letting Clarke propel himself across zero-G ship compartments—and even outside the ship entirely (courtesy of a space-suit rig). This adds a puzzle-style element that ensures you're kept alert even when it seems that, for just a moment, you might be safe from creatures paying a visit through the labyrinthine air vents.

Sure, similarities (and even 'net-denizen gripes of plain rip-off) with the *Aliens* franchise can't be completely ignored, but if it's good horror, then we'll enter the dark this way and let Sega's *Colonial Marine* fight the licensed terrors in that pure action title. You should know what to expect given *Dead Space's* expected release on Halloween. Chris Hudak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- Alcohol Reference
- Mild Language
- Suggestive Themes
- Violence

Wii

XBOX 360 LIVE

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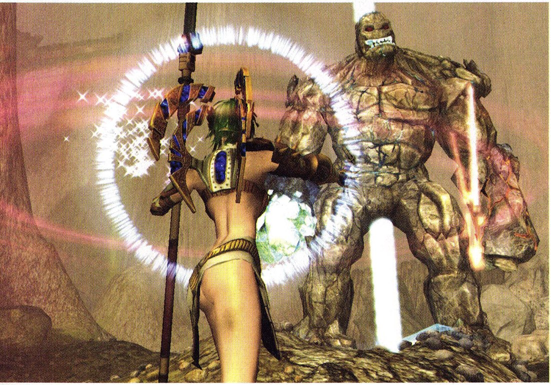
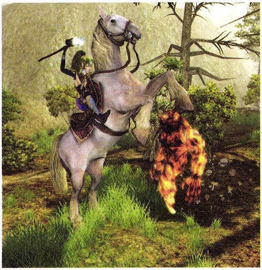


Scantily-clad Light Elf: "Eat T-Energy, abomination!" Abomination: "Yo, eyes up here, dorko."

And step, and step, and twirl, and smile!



Mounts have their own attacks and armor.

Sacred 2:

Fallen Angel

First Look Preview

Don't make us come down there

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q4 GENRE: RPG PUBLISHER: CDV Software Entertainment DEVELOPER: Ascaron Entertainment.

PS3 | P

Depending upon who you ask, publisher CDV has hitherto been known as either A) one of the few still-reputable stars of see-what-sticks PC shovelware (for every solid *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened* there's been a *Lula 3D),* or B) a rogue-hero publishing house still willing to take the occasional big-payoff gamble. Lately it's focused on a "fewer SKUs, better quality" mantra, and expansion into the console market—case in point, *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel.* This forthcoming console sequel to *Sacred*—our sister mag *PC Gamer's* 2004 RPG Game of the Year—will give PS3 gamers a crack at a huge, free-roaming, *Diablo*-inspired, action/RPG fantasy world populated by (among other things) some of the largest, nastiest boss monsters you'll see this side of a big-budget motion picture CGI-fest (Three words: Huge. Frickin'. Squid.)

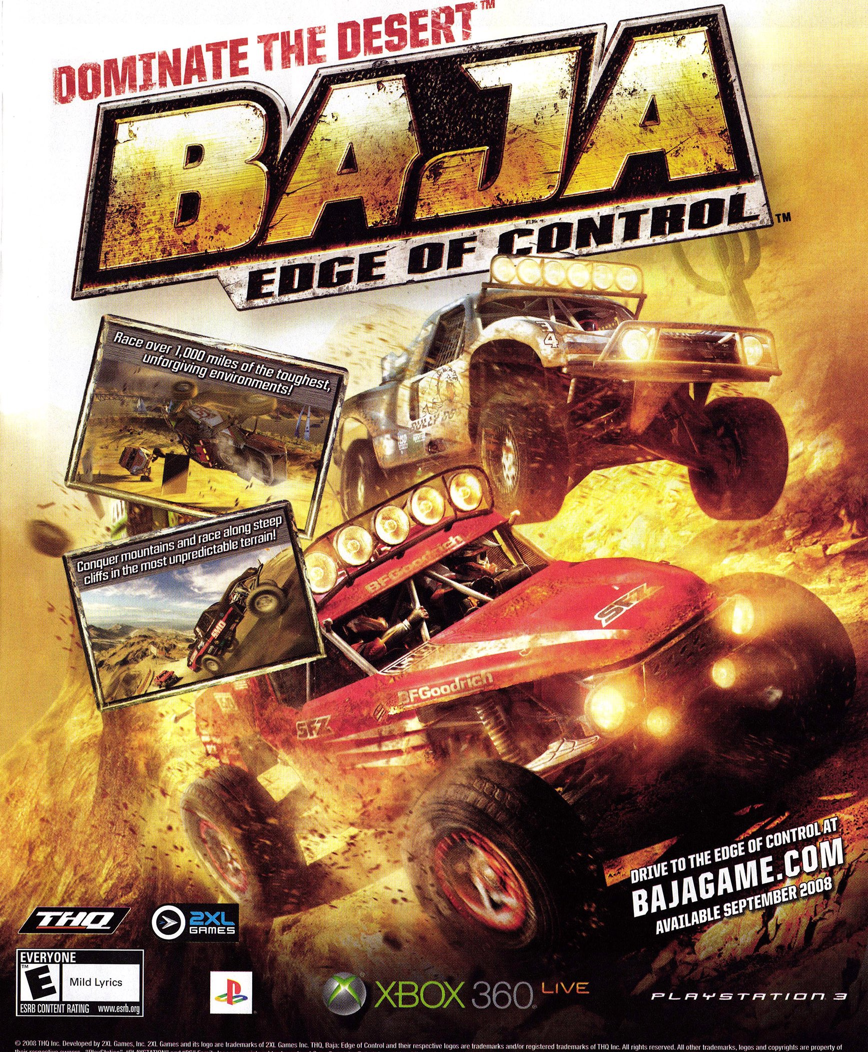
In fact, *huge* is as good a place to start as any. *Sacred 2* offers the sprawling game world of Ancaria, which spans some 22 square miles of game-space plains, desert, forests, swamps, oceans and islands—more, if you count dungeons. The official estimate is that if you were to make your way on foot from one edge of the Ancarian map to the other—not futzing around with idle NPC yammering, killing things, looking for treasure, getting stomped by screen-filling belligerents or otherwise stopping to smell the virtual roses—you'd find yourself at the end missing six hours of your life.

The setup: The Seraphim, charged with overseeing the land of Ancaria, have finally shared ye olde 411 on the sacred T-Energy with the High Elves dwelling below—of course, the whole arrangement has blown up in their angelic faces, and the once-nurturing T-Energy has gone all loose-nuke and FUBAR upon the land, creating mutated monstrosities, uninhabitable wastelands, daytime housewife-TV, etc. This state of affairs makes the aforementioned, trusting Seraphim look verily like total tools, and you're turned loose upon this mess to take the Light path, and restore order… or take the Dark path, and make things worse.

You'll be able to take up to six unique character types into some 100 central campaign quests (with several hundred side-missions!), on either the Light or Dark paths. In either case, *Sacred 2* aims to offer a main-path experience of around 20 to 25 hours. Since the world is so large, each character class will have its own race-specific mounts—from tigers to oversized arachnids to large wheels to hellhounds, with the option of standard horses available to all.

A customizable interface will allow, with the aid of the shoulder controls, up to 12 hotkeys for weapons and spells. Throughout the game, visual and race-specific touches abound—from the light, airy design of elven houses (lots of glass and interior visibility) to the subtle texture changes of both armor and skin.

As usual, the PS3 version of this sprawling action RPG is a Johnny-come-lastly, but it's on schedule. We look forward to some hands-on time so we can detail why the residents of the Higher Plains should probably never trust ground-pounders with anything important. Chris Hudak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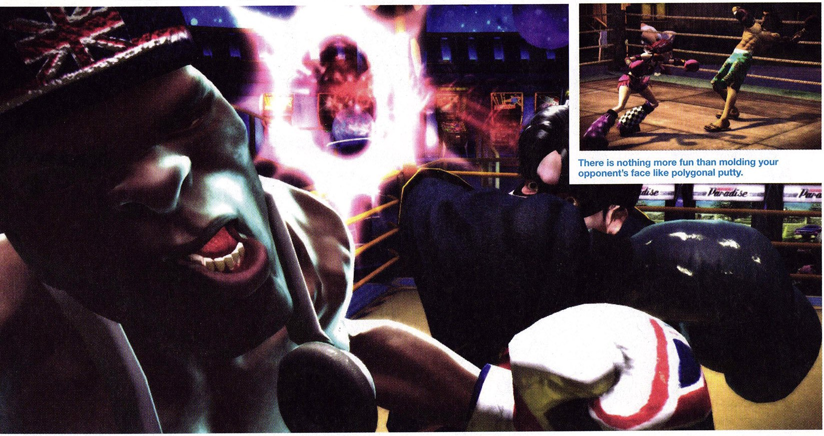


EA's arcade-style *FaceBreaker* is populated with comical characters that have more than a passing resemblance to those found in the company's own *SSX*.

There is nothing more fun than molding your opponent's face like polygonal putty.

FaceBreaker

Time to get your clock cleaned

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** September **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** EA Canada

PS3 | P

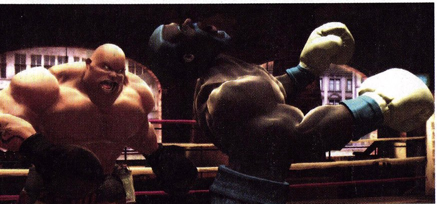
In the same way gamers once couldn't mention first-person shooters on a console without referencing *GoldenEye 007,* one simply cannot hold a conversation about boxing games without recalling the pattern-based brilliance of *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* Electronic Arts would like to change that.

A decade after it resurrected videogame boxing from the 16-bit tomb, EA is on the move with a new boxing game meant to complement the semi-regular appearance of the *Fight Night* series. *FaceBreaker* is an arcade boxing game that purposely stirs memories of Midway's hilarious but shallow *Ready to Rumble* series and, of course, the old stand-by classic, *Punch-Out!!* And EA is hoping that outrageous moves, a roster of silly characters, and simple yet potentially compelling gameplay will do the trick.

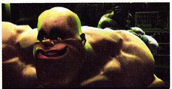
Experienced pugilists will note a few things right away. The control scheme is a straightforward modification of *Fight Night.* Using the face buttons, Square delivers a high punch and X a gut punch. Triangle brings strong attacks (haymakers), while Circle is a throw, good for escaping the ropes or hurling someone into them. Using R1 adds powerful but risky parries to a defensive array that also offers counters, dodges, and blocks. Work in dashes by double-tapping toward or away, and throws to counter breakers for a little variety. With these simple controls, you can deliver seriously fast attacks and defensive schemes that smartly mix button-mashing with a little (little being the key word) skill.

With a title as pointed as this one you'd expect some serious face breaking, too. EA's game is rich with beautifully elastic animations and punishing moves in which you can crush, pummel, stomp, or pound your opponent's face in like dough. Build up the facebreaker meter by delivering a series of uncontested blows and pull off a combo that's both brutal and funny (as long as you're the one delivering it, that is). Make it even more personal by using the PlayStation Eye to scan in your face and create a character—a feature that will surely get some serious use around the PTOM office.

Douglass C. Perry



So what if the boxers flop a little? Basketball players do it...



Collecting Heads

There are two ways to win a fight: Knock your opponent down three times, or punch their lights out with a facebreaker. If you successfully complete a facebreaker, you will happily collect your rival's pulpy, dented, black-and-blue mug and put it in your trophy room for endless bragging rights.

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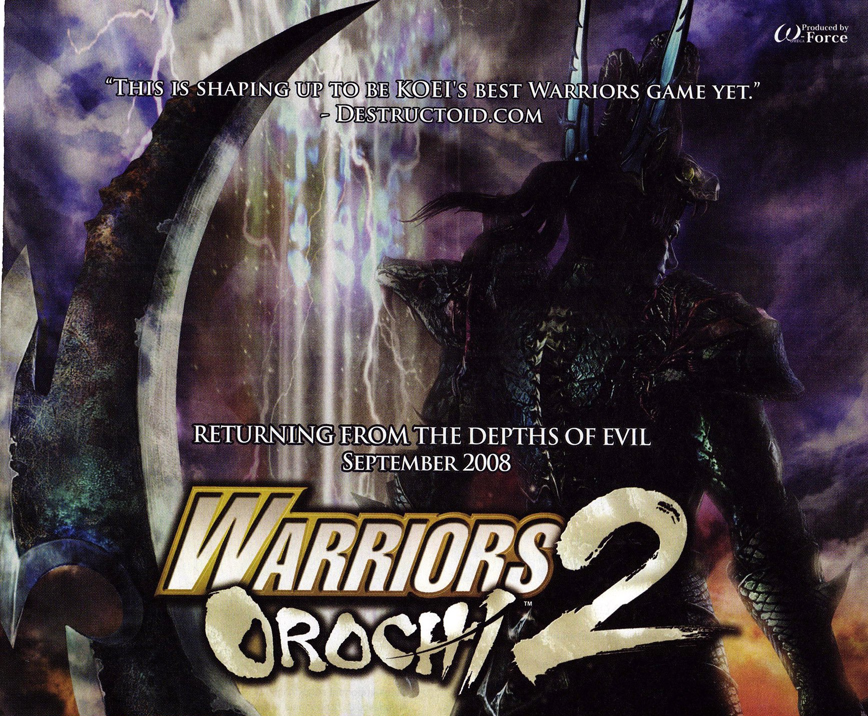

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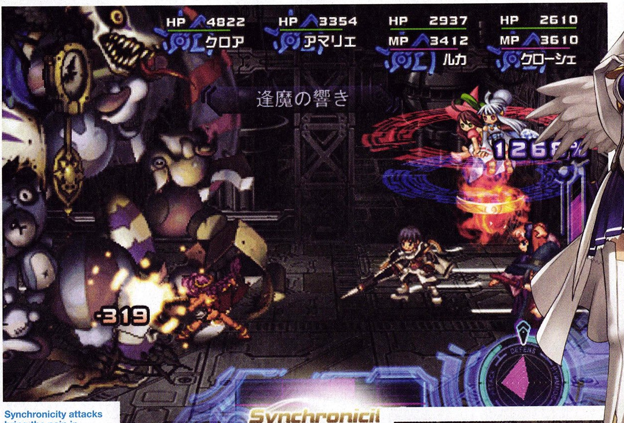


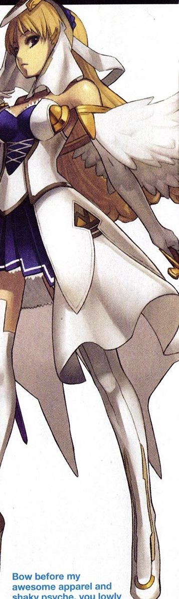
Synchronicity attacks bring the pain in perfect harmony.

Ar tonelico 2

Chasing some Reyvateil

PS2 **AVAILABLE:** December **GENRE:** RPG **PUBLISHER:** NIS America **DEVELOPER:** Gust

PS2 | **P**



Bow before my awesome apparel and shaky psyche, you lowly (and probably male) mortal gamer, you.

The *Ar tonelico* world has really had a rough time of it: The whole place has already been totally destroyed—twice—the survivors relegated to artificial landmasses high above a cataclysmically stormy, poisoned atmosphere. A vicious epidemic—the Infel Pira Dependency—has been offing the all-important musical magic-caster Reyvateils left and right. A Church of Pastalia knight named Croix is dispatched to clap a stopper on the epidemic. To add to the fun, Croix has suffered something of a crisis of passion of late; about the only thing he gives a damn about is his girlfriend, Luca…who also happens to be one of those at-risk Reyvateils. Well, hell.

A highlight of the original *Ar tonelico* experience was watching the traditional-RPG-minded react to some of its more offbeat elements: Musical combat, surreal "dives" into the conflicted psyches of artificial-hottie Reyvateils, character costume designs that would make a Harajuku cosplayer look like an anal-retentive banker…and some of the most blatant, jaw-dropping, I-can't-freaking-believe-what-I'm-watching sexual innuendo this side of Madison Avenue.

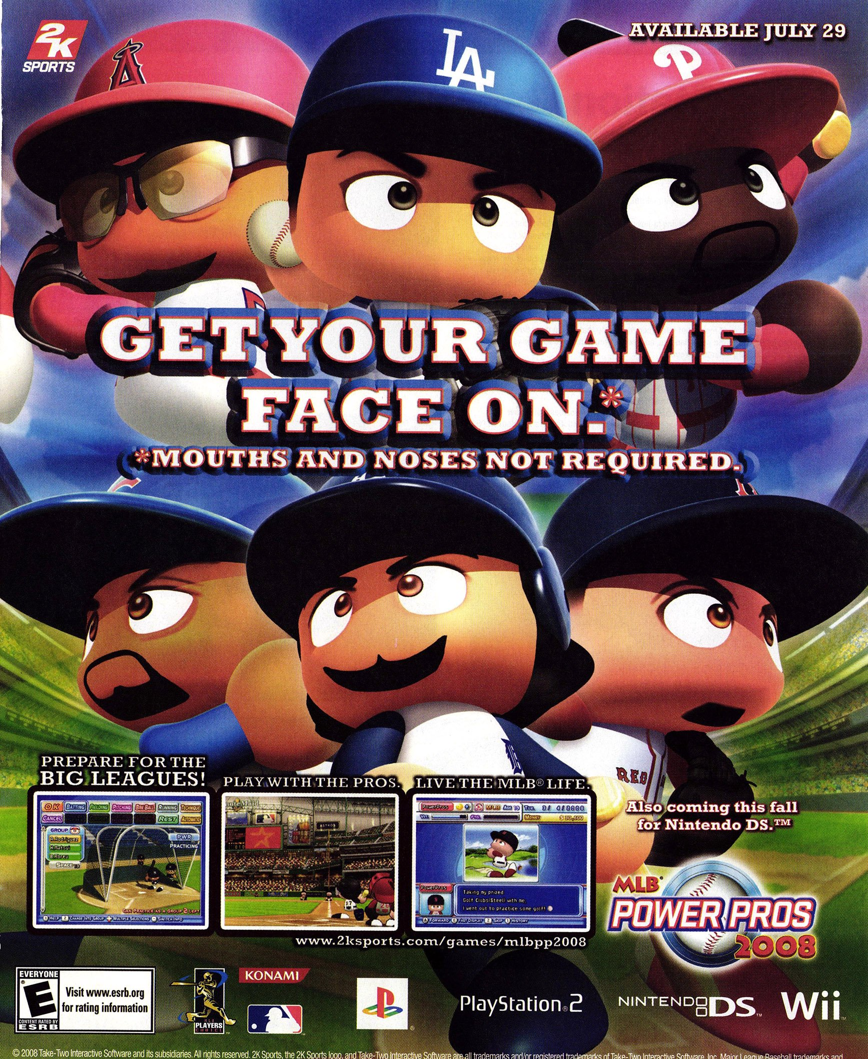
Ar tonelico 2 (Japanese subtitle translation "The Girl's Creation-Song that Echoes to the World," English-release subtitle pending) aims to keep the experience mostly intact—including the original PS2 home platform, relatively humble graphics, song-magic combat, squirmy innuendo and all—while kicking the core mechanics up a notch.

In the original game, your combat parties consisted of up to three "normal" front-line fighters and a single Reyvateil guarding the rear (oh…*so* many jokes…), casting her all-important song-magic. In *Ar tonelico 2,* song-magic is cast by two Reyvateils simultaneously, the key to victory being synchronization; by synching up the pair's will-to-combat you can pull off stronger attacks, and even acquire new hidden skills. Further, there are new ways to affect the emotions of the Reyvateils, which, in turn, can boost their effectiveness.

Another quirky *Ar tonelico* feature is back: Namely the courtship/dating-sim lite aspect, whereby you can gain the trust—and ultimately improve the combat effectiveness—of Reyvateils by diving into their Cosmophere (subconscious) and exorcising some inner demons (trying to suss out how a girl's mind works can be like defusing a mercury-switched, temperature-sensitive, decoy-circuited suitcase nuke—leave it to the Japanese to make a videogame out of it).

While genuinely entertaining, the first game was critically dinged on two points: The combat wasn't challenging enough—that protected, rear-guard song-magic would ultimately just do the Monster Mash all over potential threats—and the diving wasn't really critically linked to the story. *Ar tonelico 2,* thankfully, takes steps on both fronts. Finally, for the more hardcore players, the new shop-synthesis scheme lets the really determined go in mad-scientist, side-quest pursuit of the ultimate, refined weapons/items; the less-obsessed need only sweat it for a few key items.

Ar tonelico 2 is slated for a December U.S. release, just in time for a holiday season of song and fragile psyches. Chris Hudak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PlayStation Gallery

Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

Mirror's Edge

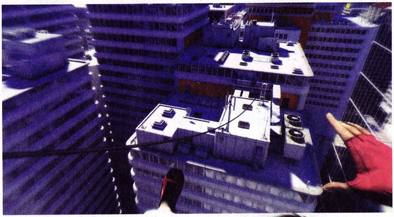
PS3 AVAILABLE: Winter GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DICE

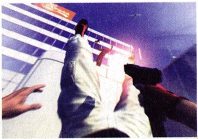
No doubt recreating the death-defying hi-jinx of parkour in first-person videogame form is a major technical challenge. "We wanted to do movement in first-person because it hasn't really been done properly before," says *Mirror's Edge* producer, Owen O'Brien, "first-person is more visceral, and it's the difference between watching the chase that opens *Casino Royale* and being in it." Having got our hands on the game for a brief run, jump, close-eyes-and-hope jaunt around the rooftops of the fictional city setting, it's clear that the sense of speed and balance imbued by the perspective does indeed work.

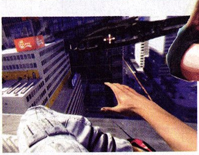
A combination of using L1 to jump up and L2 to jump/slide/roll down is a little odd. That said, it quickly became intuitive to time a jump up after running towards a ledge, and the smooth flow of movement reinforced the feeling that we'd got the timing right. Aiming for the bright red pipes, ladders, and ledges around the landscape made instantly identifying our target jumps a breeze.

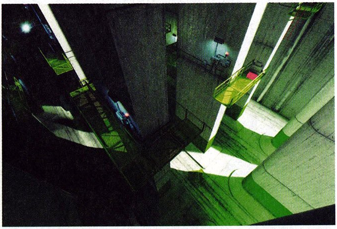
Though we didn't get to try combat, watching it in action was enlightening. Your character, Faith, has the ability (through combos of R1 and R2 buttons to grab), kick, choke, and disarm security officers, grab discarded weapons, use them on others until the clip is empty, then toss them aside and keep on running.

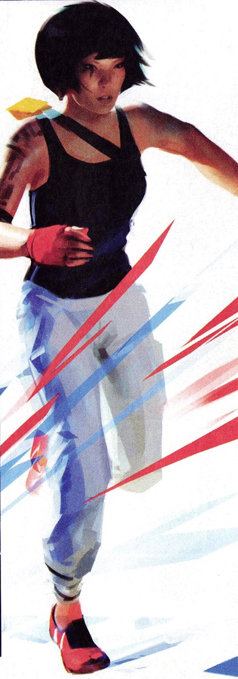
Expect even more situational awareness with precise audio cues aiding your navigation around the world. This experience has all the potential to be a standout on PS3 (better yet, PS3 is the lead version!) Just looking at the screenshots, it's hard not to get excited about *Mirror's Edge,* and fortunately the hands-on proved that the experience is matching the theory. RS

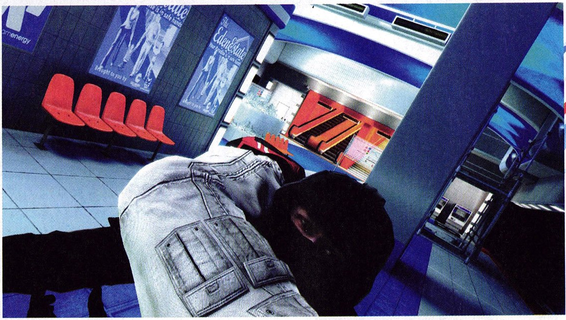












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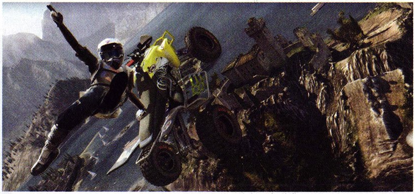
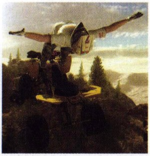
Pure

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive
DEVELOPER: Black Rock Studio

ATV racing from the guys who did, ahem, *ATV Off-Road,* so these guys know the vehicle. But *Pure* is an arcade-style racer focusing on mid-air tricks high above sprawling environments. In our playtest, it also turned out to be a surprising amount of fun as you compete against 15 other racers over courses that not only offer *MotorStorm*-like terrain, but stunt jumps of epic height. Using the analog control to lean back then push forward into a jump generates extra height, allowing more time to pull off a range of tricks, all amplified by combo uses of the R1 and L1 buttons. Earn more boost points with each trick, which opens higher-difficulty tricks if you time and control them right. It didn't take long to get hooked on the balance between performing tricks and winning the races, propelling *Pure* on to our radar as a sleeper hit-in-the-making. RS





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FRESH!
Bar Hop

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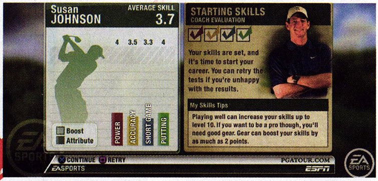

Susan JOHNSON AVERAGE SKILL 3.7

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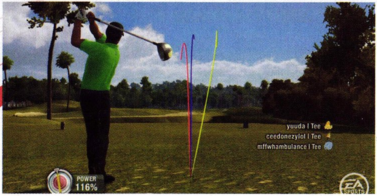

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

Tiger's coach Hank Haney is the new star of this year's golf sim as he guides you and suggests drills that will improve any weak aspect to your game. The ability to see replays of what you did wrong (or right) will help the learning process as EA Sports focuses this year's suite of games on teaching you how to play them better. Dynamic fluctuation to your attributes ensures you keep focused on all your shots, and slider options on all your equipment will let you customize clubs to match your natural control style. The requisite new courses include Gary Player Country Club in South Africa, Cheshun in Shanghai, Wentworth, England, and Wolf Creek in Mesquite, Nevada. More user-friendly online modes will reward the best player of the day, and simultaneous shot-making will speed up multiplayer matches. This just gets more and more realistic every year (though no knee surgery options are included, and the joke's already months old!) RS

Eternal Sonata

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: RPG PUBLISHER: Tri-Crescendo DEVELOPER: Namco Bandai

What unexpressed musical visions danced through the masterful Frederic Chopin's mind as he lay on his deathbed? According to the one-time Xbox 360 exclusive RPG *Eternal Sonata,* the answer is...a story about a boy and a girl stubbornly battling against destiny, accompanied by the aural backdrop of some of Chopin's greatest works? Unexpected, perhaps, but even more jarring is the way traditional turn-based and action RPG battle elements are blended—the characters take turns to perform real-time weapon-swinging and moving—in a position-sensitive system, where the same attacks evolve depending on whether you're standing in the sunlight or shade. The PS3 version will feature new quests, music, costumes, and characters and will also have multiple endings. TD

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Next
3.30
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Sacred Signature
Peach Cookie
defense
Attack
R1

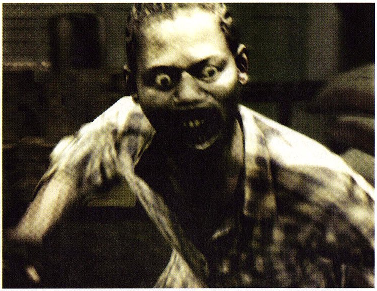
PlayStation Gallery

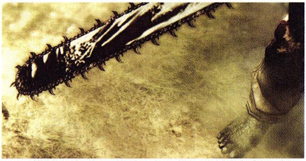
Resident Evil 5

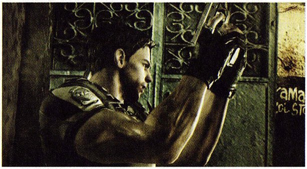
PS3 AVAILABLE: TBD/2009 GENRE: Survival Horror PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

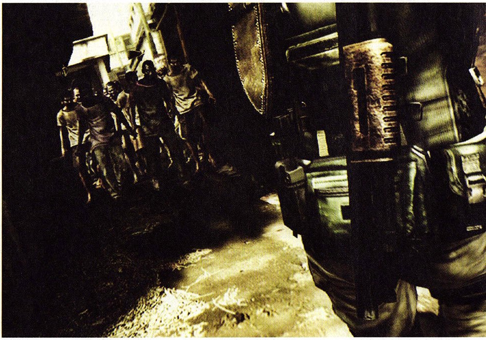
Let's get something straight up front: The team behind *Resident Evil 5* isn't trying to make a statement. "It's not our intention to create any sort of political message," says producer Jun Takeuchi. "What we are creating is entertainment. We don't have any connection to the world of politics, and that's the way we like it." So what is their intention? To scare you 'til you're begging for sweet mercy. The African setting—the birthplace of humanity and the origin of the Progenitor Virus—brings with it a new playground for horrific encounters, especially beneath the blazing hot African sun. "Most survival horror games have focused on night, on dark areas, on gloomy places," Takeuchi explains. "One of the challenges for us is to create a sense of horror in the light, try to scare the player in bright places." You'll also notice the sheer number of zombies and other hostile characters swarming around you in the screenshots. "We want to instill a sense of panic when you're surrounded."

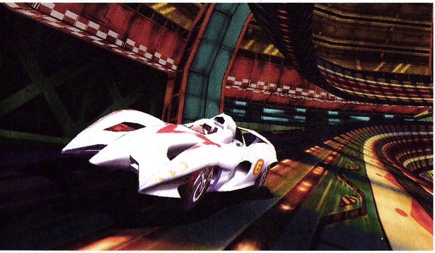
As for the new game system, we found the interface to be a bit tricky right now—especially the lack of inverted controls, our brains just work that way—but the visuals are incredibly slick, and the gameplay dynamic working with your partner generated interesting puzzle situations. It's still early days in what we know of the gameplay progression and how the story evolves, but without a doubt the look and style have *RE5* right on track to meet the ravenous fan bases' expectations. GS







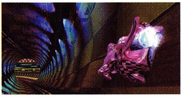


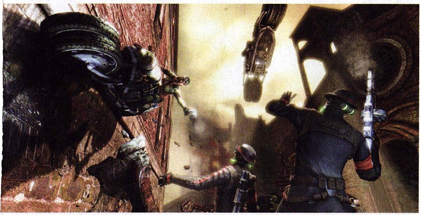


Speed Racer: The Video Game

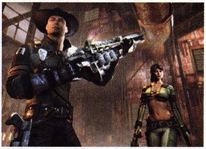
PS2 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment DEVELOPER: Sdhe Interactive

If you've always wanted to drive on psychedelic tracks unrestricted by the rules of gravity, you'll get your chance when *Speed Racer: The Videogame* is released in conjunction with the movie DVD. You can access 20 different driver/car combinations and jam through five different environments at speeds of up to 500 MPH. With car-fu you'll also be able to use your vehicle as a weapon to smash, flip, and spin other cars off the track. While *Speed Racer: The Videogame* probably won't replace arcade racers like *Burnout,* it could be a good option for the younger crowd. TD





Damnation



PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Blue Omega Entertainment

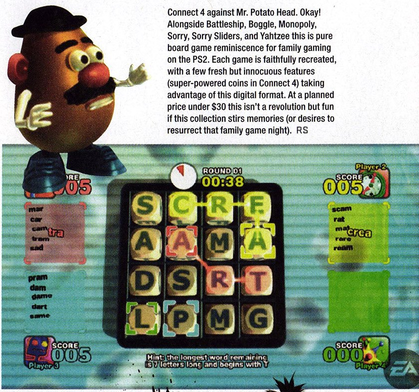
What started life as a user-mod for *Unreal Tournament 2004* is now heading to full release from new studio Blue Omega (who count movie production, but no game development in its history). This first- and third-person shooter takes place in an alternate American history that saw the Civil War rage for 40 years. Playing a character called Prescott—much like a Zorro of the 1900s—you leap across locations inspired by, but not actual recreations of, real-world settings.

Whether you're hanging off building ledges, traversing canyons, back-flipping into buildings, or using the stylized armory of weapons, *Damnation* seems to have an interesting backdrop to its core *Unreal*-powered action gameplay. Let's just hope it doesn't follow *Turning Point's* example of a great idea, poorly executed. RS

Hasbro Family Fun Night

PS2 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Board games PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA

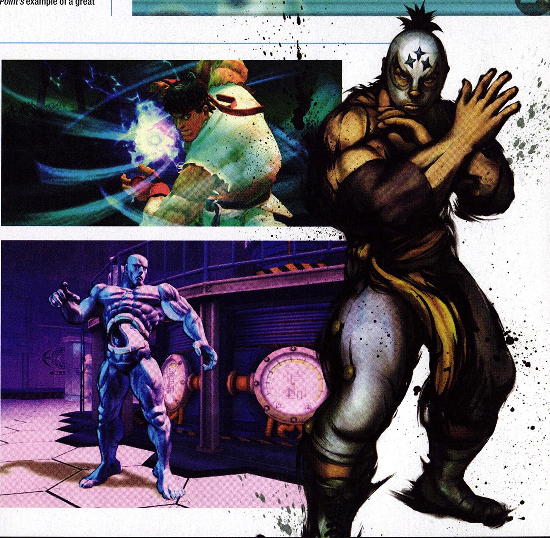
Connect 4 against Mr. Potato Head. Okay! Alongside Battleship, Boggle, Monopoly, Sorry, Sorry Sliders, and Yahtzee this is pure board game reminiscence for family gaming on the PS2. Each game is faithfully recreated, with a few fresh but innocuous features (super-powered coins in Connect 4) taking advantage of this digital format. At a planned price under $30 this isn't a revolution but fun if this collection stirs memories (or desires to resurrect that family game night). RS

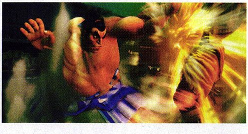


Street Fighter IV

PS3 AVAILABLE: TBA/2009 GENRE: Fighting PUBLISHER: Capcom DEVELOPER: Capcom

Some skills are simply unforgettable—no matter how long it's been, you'll pick up right where you left off. Like riding a bike. Or making a spinach-and-feta omelet. Or pulling off Ryu's fireball attack in *Street Fighter II.* That's exactly what Capcom is banking on with *Street Fighter IV:* a nostalgic return to form for hardcore fans that also serves as the perfect reintroduction to 2D fighters for newbies. That's why the game not only offers the unique hand-drawn look of the original classic, but it also includes all 12 of the *SFII* roster (along with four new characters). But most important is how it plays. For us, it truly feels like *SFII*—a profoundly 2D fighter despite the inclusion of 3D elements. Producer Yoshi Ono told us the collision detection was tweaked to give *SFIV* a more 2D feel after extensive testing in Japan. Originally, the detection was based on 3D physics, with reactions being triggered when two objects connect; on the other hand, 2D games allow the images to "push deeper" into each other, for a more cartoony effect. Japanese players didn't like the realistic feel of the 3D reactions, leading to an appropriate adjustment. We're delighted our friends across the sea complained, because it currently feels exactly like we remember. GS





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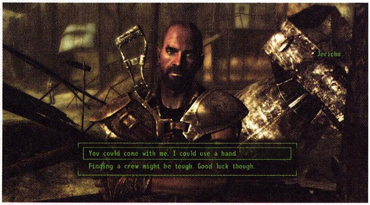
Fallout 3

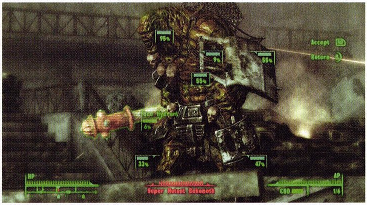
PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Action/RPG PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks
DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks

Despite the atomic wasteland setting of *Fallout 3* every detail is bathed with a twisted, wretched beauty. Whether it's the bombed-out ruins of an elementary school or the rusting hulls of long-abandoned boats on the banks of a radioactive river, the game's rich, muddy detail gives *Fallout's* free-roaming world a very real sense of lonely desolation. At the same time, it's clear that plenty is going on behind the bleakness, as we quickly learned during our first hands-on session. There are locks to pick, radio broadcasts to listen to, ragged survivors to chat up, and computers to hack. And the wasteland is crammed with danger at every turn, mostly in the form of vicious mutants and armed raiders. We could take them out using the arsenal of guns as per a first-person shooter, but it was much more fun to use the turn-based aiming system to target specific body parts, turning what could have been simple gunfights into gruesome, slow-motion bloodbaths. Gore aside, the stunning amount of detail and stuff to do has *Fallout 3* poised to outdo Bethesda's award-winning *Oblivion* in every respect. We'll know for sure as we edge closer to its late-2008 release. MR



You could come with me. I could use a hand.

Finding a crew might be tough. Good luck though.



Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli

PS3/PS2 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Racing PUBLISHER: System 3 DEVELOPER: System 3

When a company boasts that its racing game is the best-handling on a next-gen system, you (and *Gran Turismo* fans everywhere) should pay attention. *Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli's* garage isn't teeming with the volume of rides in *GT,* but System 3 seems intent on living up to its promise of producing the ultimate in driving simulations for PS3. *Ferrari Challenge* will only feature Ferraris—approximately 50 classic and contemporary models—each one driven and tested by professional race driver Bruno Senna, so that System 3 can recreate the driving experience with impeccable authenticity and detail. The game will feature over 15 international tracks with multiple play modes including single, season, time trial, and endurance races. Planned DLC will consist of one new track and five cars per month. Any download featuring licensed-products will have to be purchased, but free experience-enhancing downloads like trophies, custom liveries, and vinyls will also be available. RB

28
PIRELLI
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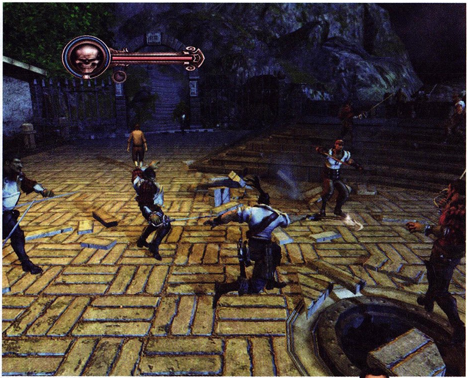
SYSTEM 3

Rock Band 2

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Rhythm music PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Harmonix

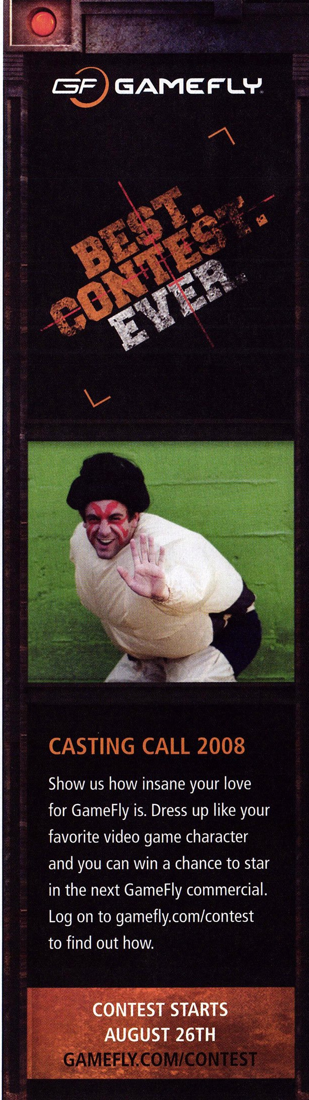
Surely the number one objective of *Rock Band 2* is not to mess it up. On the back of some 12 million song downloads, it's clear the formula works. And to help spread the love, Harmonix CEO Alex Rigopulos confirmed an expandable drum kit; the new set will feature softer, more precise, and wireless drum pads, along with the option to add other pieces such as cymbals. Over 70 new songs will be included (including Foo Fighter's Everlong), and downloads from *Rock Band* will work with this sequel. On the feature side, online band support and online Battle of the Bands modes will let you get together with buddies around the world, and compete with other bands for song high scores. It certainly appears that the tweaks will improve the experience, but we'll see closer to launch whether it warrants another $170-plus purchase. RS



Captain Blood

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Action adventure PUBLISHER: 1C
DEVELOPER: SeaWolf

There can and will never be enough pirate-themed games, but 1C's forthcoming *Captain Blood* brings us at least one title closer. Based on the fiction of Rafael Sabatini, developer SeaWolf's forthcoming mission-based hack-and-slasher puts you in the Spanish Main boots of the titular Captain, circa 1685. You'll fight in land-based melee combat, sea-based ship-to-ship battles, and subsequent boarding actions. The melee combat is straightforward, button-mashy and bloody; playing as Captain Blood (and occasionally as his shipmaster ally Jeremy Pitt), you'll use swords, guns, axes, and explosives via a simple interface—two attack buttons, a grapple control, and a pistol attack (no targeting—just point your character in the desired direction, pull the trigger, and hope for the best). Rack up experience points and you'll earn more complex and effective combos, as well as gold to purchase new items. It wouldn't be a real pirate game without ship-to-ship actions, and here it mixes both traditional and more offbeat elements: Cannon fire, mines, ramming, and even a form of flame-thrower. The wind plays a role, of course, and a choice of standard round or grape shot shreds both the ship decks and the sailors manning them. After you've thumped it into the enemy's ships, you can take them in boarding actions, adding any captured vessels to your fleet. As of this writing, *Captain Blood* will offer roughly 30 hours of single-player story mode, and at least co-op multiplayer—with the possible addition of multiplayer deathmatches on both land and sea—development-time permitting. CH



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We go hands-on with the year's most ambitious sports game and show you the most fully integrated online multiplayer system of all time!

everything went White

By Scott Butterworth

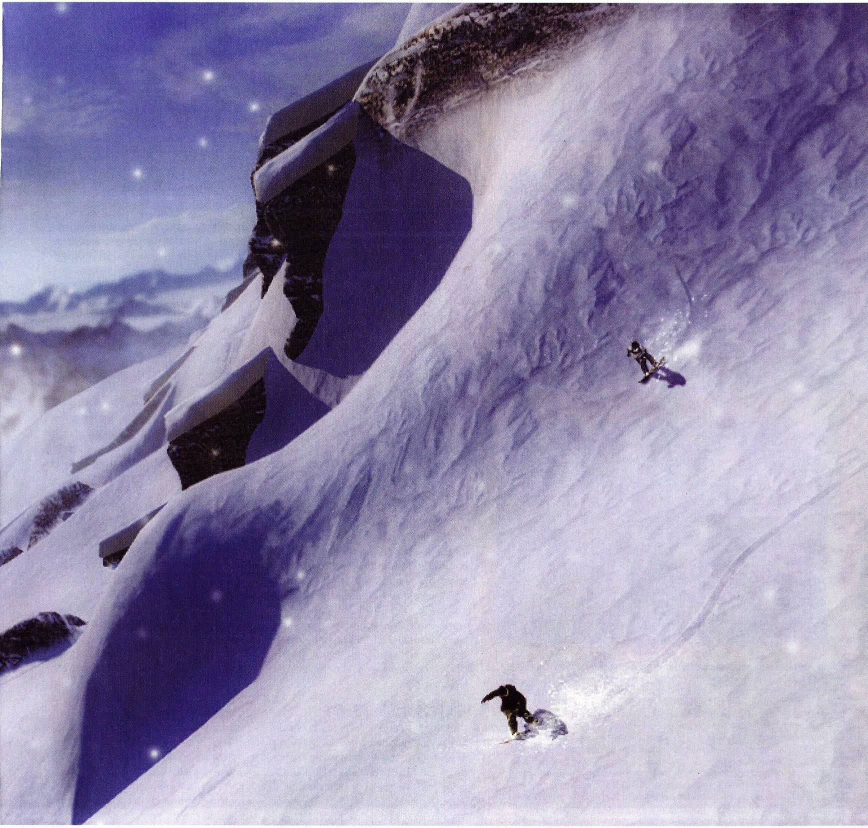
Platform: PS3, PSP

AVAILABLE: OCTOBER

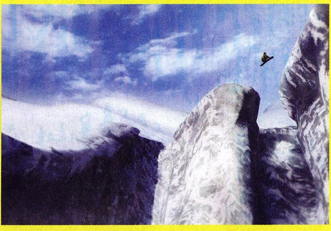
GENRE: ACTION SPORTS

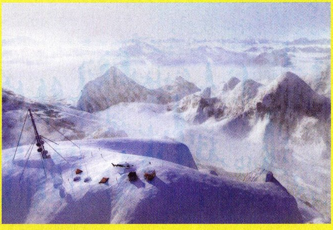
PUBLISHER: UBISOFT

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL



Fresh powder. Somehow the world seems new, bathed in an unfamiliar serenity, washed clean by the pure white snow that literally sparkles in the crisp morning sunlight. As you look down upon the slope before you, you can't help but feel overwhelmed by an amazing sense of freedom, of challenge, of possibility. And with your board on your feet and your friends by your side, you're ready to explore not just the mountain but also your own limitations. At this moment, snowboarding transcends mere sport and becomes something altogether more powerful, and you think to yourself, "Wow, I might like to try this for real someday." **Welcome to Shaun White Snowboarding.**





Complete Control

On which end of the action sports spectrum does *SWS* fall: button-mashing fantasy or demandingly precise reality? Well, after our hands-on time, we'd have to say it's somewhere in between. The basic trick system is very accessible and, in many ways, quite reminiscent of the Tony Hawk setup: R2 serves as the designated jump button, and performing basic grabs is as simple as holding L2 and pushing the right analog stick in any direction. You can add spins and flips by simply holding the left analog stick in the direction you want to rotate. Sounds pretty *Pro Skater* so far, right? But the controls get a whole lot deeper from here: you can tweak any grab by pressing L2 again while in the air and the amount of pressure you apply to the button will affect how hard your rider tweaks his board. You can choose to execute more advanced and unconventional grabs by pressing the R3 button while flicking the analog stick in any direction. Rail slides and flatland tricks both feature very *Skate*-like controls: there is no grind button or balance meter—meaning that successfully hitting a rail and maintaining your balance is entirely manual—and tricks like nose and tail presses require you to balance the right analog stick halfway between centered and all the way forward or back. Finally, you have to learn to finesse the right analog stick in just the right way while airborne in order to increase your rotation speed (or to simply center your board so you don't catch an edge when you land). The depth is at the expense of a learning curve, but if you don't master this technique, you'll probably find it hard to complete any rotation beyond a 540. Tricky.

Snowboarding games have never been especially adept at providing a realistic portrayal of the popular action sport. Fun though they may be, they've never really captured the big picture. And this, according to Ubisoft's producer Louis Lamarche, is exactly what *Shaun White Snowboarding* is going to change. It's more than a snowboarding game, he says, it's a "lifestyle experience."

Perhaps the most important part of that experience—at least, according to the guy the game is named after (see sidebar: White Noise)—is simply having the freedom to ride whenever and however you want with your friends, and to that end, the team at Ubisoft Montreal is creating what could be considered the most thoroughly open multiplayer experience ever on a console.

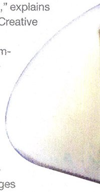
"The beauty of our multiplayer is that there's no notion of [the activities] being single-player or multiplayer. Everything is the same. There's no lobby. The lobby is the mountain. And once you're on the mountain, you can play alone even though other people are there, just like being in *World of Warcraft.* The only difference is, you don't quest with other people, you can just do your own thing and the game offers that," Lamarche explains. And yes, he did just compare his snowboarding game to an MMORPG.

Really, the implication isn't too outlandish. If you elect to ride online, your friends will be with you literally every step of the way (if you want them to be). You'll share an open world that just happens to be perpetually sloping and covered in snow, and you'll interact in whatever ways you choose: competing, cooperating, or just aimlessly enjoying the winter wonderland together. In this way, the line between single-player and multiplayer begins to blur.

against me!

Consider the game's highly structured Ultimate Competition campaign. Scattered around each of the game's four mountains are 18 different events like death races and various trick competitions. If you manage to beat all 18, you'll unlock that mountain's ultimate competition, and once you complete all four of those, you'll compete against Shaun White himself in what you might consider the game's final boss battle. In most games, this event structure would serve as the main single-player campaign, but in *SWS,* it plays something of a dual role.

"The player's progression isn't altered by the fact that he is online. When he's competing, it is his individual performance that we track. So, it doesn't change anything whether he's competing against his friends or the AI," explains Philippe Morin, the game's Creative Director.



Essentially, the Ultimate Competition operates simultaneously as the single-player campaign and a form of competitive multiplayer. By replacing AI-controlled opponents with your real-life friends, events that would otherwise be glorified high-score challenges against virtual characters suddenly become venues for genuine competition between actual human beings, while still allowing you to progress towards the game's ultimate goal of besting Shaun in a head-to-head competition.

Of course, you don't have to compete against your friends if you don't want to. When you trigger an event, you'll see a list of all the people playing with you on the mountain and have an opportunity to invite any or all of them to join you (and your invitation won't disrupt their game at all unless they choose to accept it). If you decide to go it alone, your friends will still be able to see you compete since events all take place directly on the shared mountain in real-time. The entire process is designed to keep you as immersed as possible in the actual gameplay.

face to face

The Ultimate Competition isn't the only set of missions though, and Shaun's role in the game isn't limited to "final boss." He plays the helpful mentor in what could loosely be termed the game's the story mode (though it's light on both story and cutscenes). He'll ask you to track down several items that are hidden throughout all four mountains and as you find them, he'll grant you more "focus power," a contextually sensitive boost meter that you can use at any time.

And once again, your friends are absolutely invited to come along. "If you're playing with your friends, you can actually explore the mountain together and find the items," Morin advises. And so, Shaun's quests instantly become a form of cooperative multiplayer in addition to being a sort of single-player story mode.

And what exactly are the hidden items? "I prefer not to say because I ➲

> "That's the beauty of our multiplayer. There's no notion of [the activities] being single-player or multiplayer. Everything is the same."
>
> Louis Lamarche, Ubisoft Montreal

Make All The

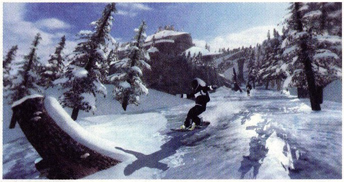
White Moves

As you progress through the game, your character's animations will actually change to match the quality of your riding. At first, your tricks will look sloppy and your riding sketchy, but eventually you'll ride just like Shaun. "A lot of the art animation—especially the final set of animations—is really reflective of Shaun's specific style of riding and tricking. We followed Shaun for a full day in Park City non-stop with four HD cameras pointed at him at every angle just to capture everything that we could on his style and how he rides," Lamarche says. Apparently they even had a cameraman follow Shaun off jumps in order to film him in the air.

As you ride down the mountains, you'll constantly have eight cameras filming you. At any time, you can pause the game to edit and save the last 30 seconds of your ride.

If you see a spot you like on the way down, you can get off your board and walk there or set a checkpoint and warp back.

Shaun White Snowboarding blurs the line between single-player and multiplayer as in-game objectives can be achieved whether you're playing with friends or on your own.



would prefer people discovering what Shaun hid," Lamarche teases. "You'll get to interact with Shaun in a way that Shaun wanted, get a chance to know him more, get a chance to see his sense of humor." Not only has White been heavily involved in the design process, but he and his brother Jesse also wrote every last shred of dialogue and handpicked the soundtrack music.

snow patrol

But don't let competition and objectives get in the way of the true snowboarding experience: Free Ride mode. You and your friends have complete freedom to negotiate the precarious ridges of mountain peaks, explore the uncharted backcountry, and dominate the park areas all in a single seamless ride down the mountain. You can even try to outrun an avalanche.

If you see a spot you like on the way down, you can get off your board and walk there or just set a checkpoint and warp back to it at any time. You can also film yourself (or your friends, thanks to the optional first-person camera) using the very *Skate*-like replay system—which features adjustable camera angles and basic editing tools—and then share your clip online.

Not only are the environments completely open, but the game lets you go anywhere and do anything from the moment you pop in the disc. "The reason why we did that is because of the seamless multiplayer. So if your friends bought the game two weeks before you, you can still go ride with them," Lamarche explains.

All of your riding in *SWS* actually counts towards something. "The moment I do a trick, I start a 'session.' And as soon as I stop, I bank my reputation," Lamarche says. "Reputation" serves not only as an overall measure of your skill (think leaderboards) but can also be used to buy new clothes and boards for your rider, and as a wager in custom-created competitions against your friends.

So regardless of how you decide to play the game, you'll always be able to play with your friends and progress through the game. And as a result, the very notions of single-player and multiplayer have all but disappeared. Even if you don't ordinarily care about action sports games, that's something to get excited about. ➔

White Noise

PTOM I've heard that you aren't a huge fan of the snowboarding games that you've appeared in prior to this (*Cool Boarders 4* and *Shaun Palmer Pro Snowboarder*). Is this true?

SHAUN WHITE It's always hard looking at the games in the past. There was always some glaring stereotype that bummed me out. In the end, I think they all missed the essence of what snowboarding is about. There was a lack of freedom and creativity that I think my game offers.

What do you feel are the most important aspects of the snowboarding lifestyle (or snowboarding in general) and how are you trying to capture them in the game?
SW: There are a couple: first the babes. Tons of babes on the hill. Really, nothing but babes everywhere. Really, we just wanted to make it feel like snowboarding feels. There are tons of possibilities in the game; you can basically ride wherever you want. Also, we wanted to make sure you could ride with your friends, so I'm stoked on the multiplayer option. You can talk smack on the hill, challenge people, it's really similar to real life.

Do you feel that snowboarding culture is ever misunderstood or misrepresented?
SW: Totally; stereotypes are always hard for people to see past. There are just so many misconceptions about what kids say and how they act. I mean, I like to say the word "dude," but not in every sentence. In the end, it's always a balance. It's like that for every generation though. Hippies had to go through that, so did the kids of the '80s. With every sponsor or project we try to work with them to see past that.

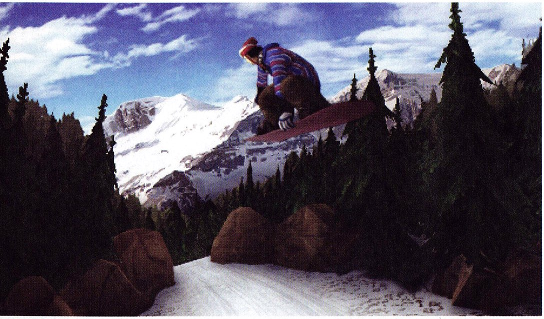
PTOM: Do you think your game will inspire people to go out and start snowboarding for real?
SW: I really hope it will. It's hard for people to get into it, but hopefully they will see the possibilities and fun in snowboarding and get inspired. If not, then I just hope they are stoked about the game.

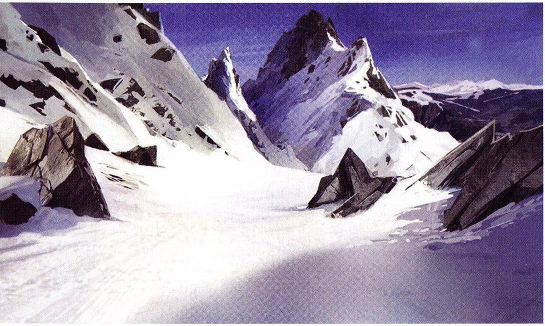
Slope Styles

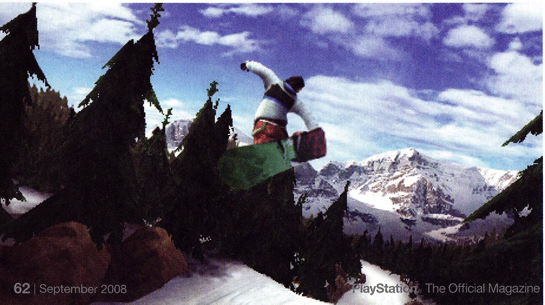
While the game's multiplayer design is probably its most impressive feature, the environments are shaping up to be a close second. According to Lamarche, each of the four mountains—Utah, Alaska, Europe, and Japan—contains 150,000 trees "no problem" and will take a good two to three hours to fully explore. Even at top speed, it'll take about 10 minutes to travel from peak to base on any one of them. Lamarche also claims that you'll be able to see 20 kilometers down the mountain thanks to the incredible draw distance of the *Assassin's Creed* engine. Sheer size isn't their only impressive feature, though. The team is taking care to create truly authentic and exciting board parks, regularly consulting with ex-pro Todd Richards and professional park designer Chris Gunnarson—whose company built parks for the Winter X-Games from 1997 to 2006—to ensure that their parks become the ultimate snowboard playgrounds. After checking out the epic park on the Japanese mountain, we can safely say that they're right on track.

The game will feature both co-op and competitive multiplayer modes so you won't have to ride the slopes alone like this guy.

If you're the type that likes snowboarding on the go, don't worry, *Shaun White Snowboarding* is also heading to the PSP.







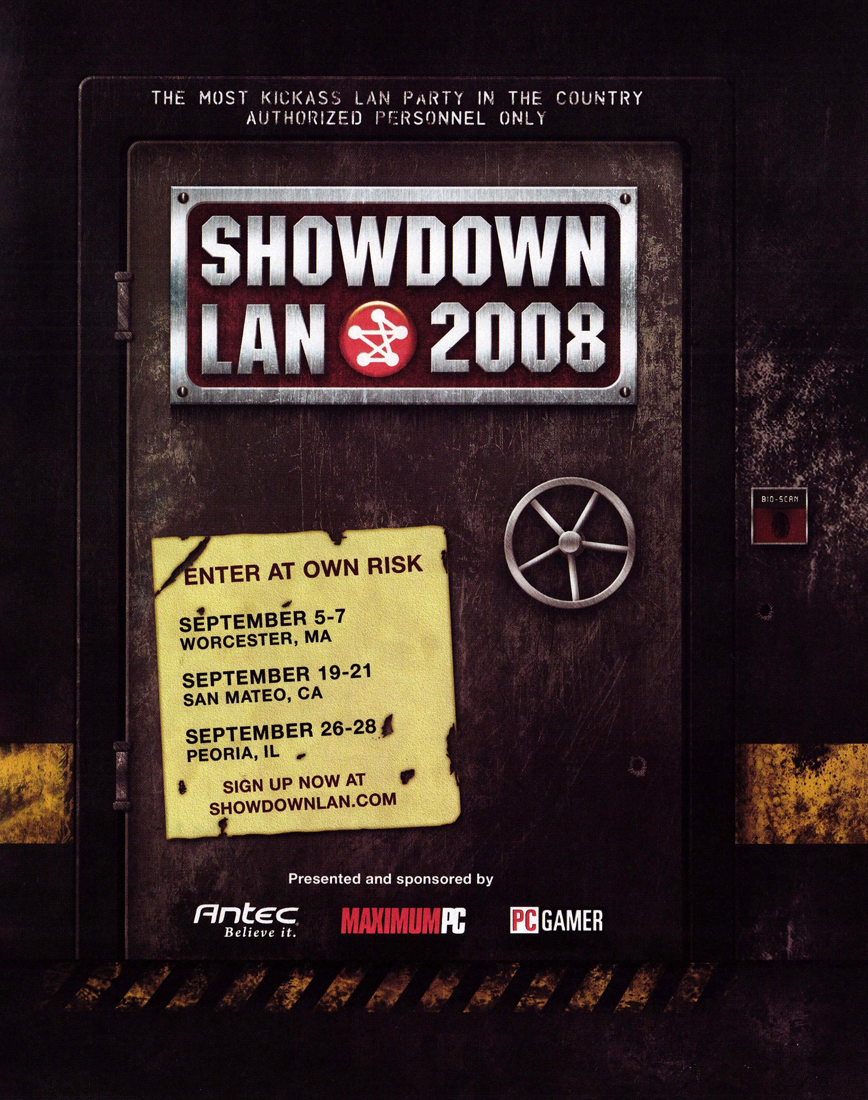
Exclusive First Look:
SWS on PSP

If you're the type that likes snowboarding on the go, don't worry, you won't have to move mountains to make it happen: *Shaun White Snowboarding* is also heading to the PSP, and it's specifically designed to fill those dull in-between minutes like, say, when you're riding a chairlift. Because of this emphasis on shorter play sessions, the game's underlying structure is radically different from its PS3 big brother. In fact, about the only thing the two share is the name (whose role within the PSP game is minimal, though White did help brainstorm for the project according to the developers).

The gameplay focuses on four abilities: speed, trick, grind, and carve. Basically these are categories in which you accumulate points. Earn points in the speed category by tucking and bombing down the slope without hitting anything—the longer you maintain your speed, the more points you gain. Earn carve points by performing long, deep turns using the trigger buttons—the more consecutive turns you execute, the more points you get (bonus points for performing near-miss carves around objects in the environment). Earn trick and grind points by…well, take a guess.

The game is divided into five mountains, each of which has four runs that take about two to three minutes to complete (no open world exploration here). Early runs will give you point objectives in just one of the four categories, but later, more difficult runs will force you to meet point requirements in multiple categories simultaneously. Beating these objectives will unlock new mountains, and once you've beaten all of a mountain's objectives and collected certain items hidden in the runs, you'll unlock that mountain's "super challenge." The devs didn't reveal the super challenges, but we're guessing they'll be challenging and possibly even super.

Even if you don't manage to complete a run's point objectives, you'll still gain experience for trying. Any points you earn during a run—regardless of whether or not they count towards the run's objectives—are translated into experience when you cross the finish line. The only catch is, if you've completed that run previously, only the points above your earlier high score will count. Experience can be spent either upgrading your rider's attributes (speed level, trick level, etc.) or buying new boards. ■



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LINGER IN SHADOWS

By Gary Steinman

Right now I'm thinking about Magritte. Or, to be more specific, I'm thinking about a series of Magritte paintings depicting a pipe, with cursive writing beneath stating: *"Ceci n'est pas une pipe."*

I'm contemplating Magritte because I'm playing with a new PSN product called *Linger in Shadows.* I have just paused *Linger* right at the point where a preternaturally substantial cat has turned to peer at me. With a tap of the X button, I stop the scenario. I tap Triangle to unlock the camera, then tilt the Sixaxis controller to pan around a high-rise rooftop littered with industrial ductwork. I try rewinding a bit, then fast-forwarding. I pause again, tap a few other buttons, and somehow trigger a hypnotic swirling motion in a cloud of ominous black fog ahead of me.

I am searching for something, but I'm not exactly sure what—or why. And that's precisely why I'm thinking about Magritte's famous pipe with those French words beneath stating, "This is not a pipe." Because, despite the fact that *Linger in Shadows* is on my PS3, delivered to me via PSN, controlled by my DualShock3, I'm not quite sure if this is game. I'm playing *with* it, but I'm not quite *playing* it. Perhaps it's playing with me…?

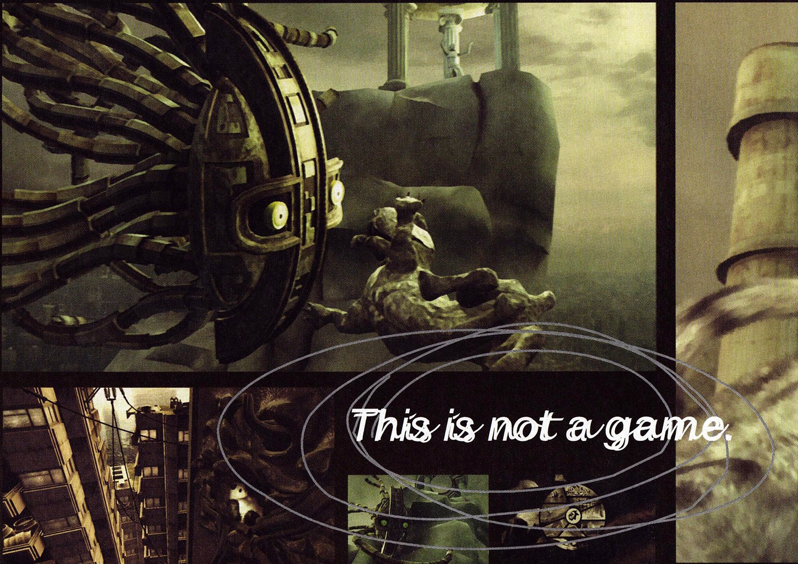
But enough navel-gazing. I'm intrigued enough to learn more, so I take a break to call Rusty Buchert, senior producer at SCEA's Santa Monica Studio. This is Rusty's project, so if anyone could tell me what exactly I'm doing, it would be him.

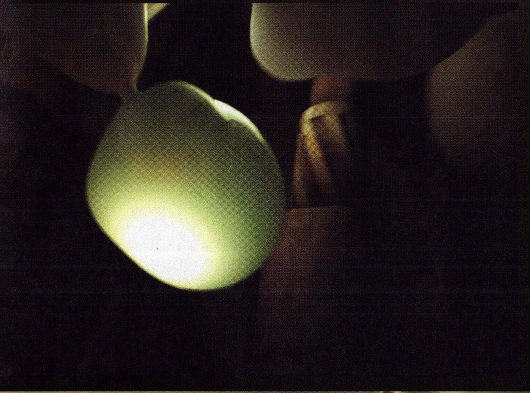
I begin our conversation with a concept that's been percolating in my head: "I'm toying with the notion of ambient gaming," I begin. "Y'know, something akin to ambient music: a format that rewards you as much for playing as not playing. Would you consider *Linger in Shadows* an 'ambient' game?"

"I understand where you're going—where it can either be an active or a passive experience," Rusty answers, somewhat begrudgingly. "I agree that's a new direction we're seeing in gaming. I just don't know if I would call it ambient. Unfortunately ambient always brings to mind for me Brian Eno and some of his biorhythm ambient, which went way too far, as far as I'm concerned. Because at the end of the day, we're trying to take people through a unique experience."

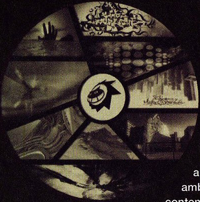
OK, so what exactly is *Linger,* then?

"It's interactive digital art," Rusty says. "It is not a game."





"At the end of the day, we're trying to take people through a unique experience."



Any PS3 product that can spark a legitimate conversation that effortlessly moves from the epistemological explorations of Surrealist artist Magritte to the ambient noodlings of contemporary musician Brian Eno is noteworthy in and of itself. And, to be sure, *Linger in Shadows* is likely to spark these exact kinds of discussions in living rooms across the nation when it hits PSN this summer. But more than that, *Linger* is, well…cool.

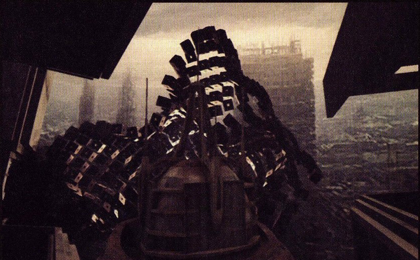
Here's how *Linger* works: It begins with a cloudy sky. Soothing classical music plays while the clouds drift by. A striking female face emerges, then is washed away. Images form inside the clouds. (Is that a…dog?) A male face appears. Words materialize—perhaps credits, but delivered with an artistic flair. Then, at precisely one minute and 54 seconds, everything stops and the scenario rewinds. At this point, it's up to you to figure out how to trigger the first of four "sigils." (Here's a hint: try shaking the controller.) Each sigil unlocks another segment, until you're rewarded with the full 6:50 of video. Then, you play with it. You study it, and you are mesmerized by it. You pause the action and move the camera around, exploring the details beyond the frame of the artwork. And you search for "Greets"—hidden stickers that are like shout-outs to other demoscene creators. Find all 10 and you unlock the next segment. Once everything is unlocked, you have what amounts to an interactive video installation that clocks in at around nine minutes total. Keep in mind that *Linger* will ship with very little documentation and no instructions; much of what you will experience is shrouded in mystery. "This is very much about you exploring and playing around with it and finding things within it," Rusty says.

LINGER IN THE DEMOSCENE

How the project came about is decidedly less mysterious. *Linger* emerged out of a movement called demoscene, an artistic subculture that Rusty had been following since before it fully existed, back when it was part of a hacker subculture that began on 8-bit home computers like the Commodore 64 and continued into the 32-bit Amiga era. The earliest predecessors were so-called cracked screens that hackers would place as a signature in front of any software they hacked. Eventually, this digital graffiti became more and more elaborate, evolving from high-tech vandalism into a sophisticated artform discrete from any illegally hacked software. These days, the demoscene is far removed from its early hacker roots. Sure, it retains its feisty, fiercely independent spirit, but the focus is squarely on the legitimate construction of elaborate expressions of creative and technical skills. "You have various little groups of artists, coders, musicians, who work to put together compositions," Rusty says. "They do this out of passion. These are people who love making art, and they view what they do as making art." The movement remains esoteric in the U.S., but it has grown by leaps and bounds throughout Europe. In fact, an annual competition in Germany called Breakpoint—where many people first learned about *Linger*—routinely attracts between 15,000 and 25,000 visitors.

Rusty's personal interest (he created a few cracked screens of his own back in the day) isn't the only thing that sparked SCEA's interest in the demoscene. For starters, plenty of big-name developers cut their teeth in demoscene, including luminaries like Tim Moss (lead programmer of *God of War),* Didier Malenfant (co-founder of Ready at Dawn), and the entire core team that founded developer Starbreeze (which used to be a demoscene group known as Triton).

Perhaps more important, the demoscene is a natural breeding ground for innovation. Since the demoscene



Save the Dog

A dog, a cat, a panda bear. A statue reminiscent of an ancient Greek goddess. Floating cubes that undulate in the sky. A tentacled cybernetic mask that wreaks havoc above the postindustrial urban landscape. Looks cool, sure—but what the heck does it mean?

"I'm going to go the art route here for a moment," Rusty says. "Art's about people's personal interpretation. There's nothing more interesting than going through an exhibit and looking at a variety of things, then you form your own opinions about what they were trying to do, or what emotions they're trying to convey, or why. And then you take a tour, where they tell you what the artist's point was. And it often is very different. I would rather let people form their own interpretation than tell them what they should be thinking."

So what do *you* think? After you play around with *Linger,* we'd love to hear your interpretation, so send your thoughts to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com (mark the subject line "Linger in Shadows") and we'll print the most interesting ones in an upcoming issue.

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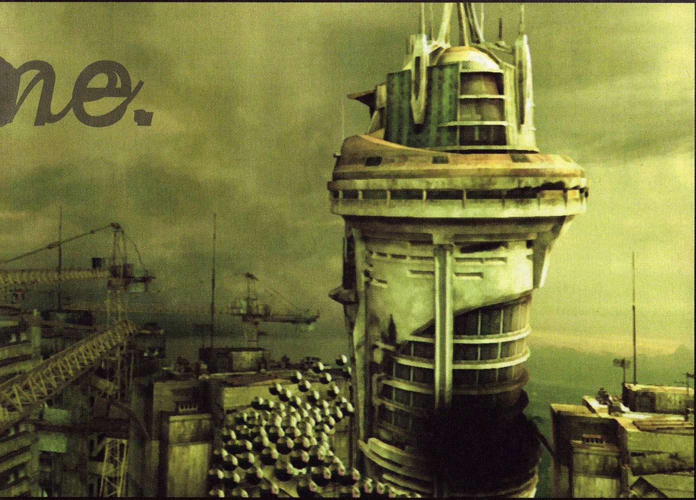


“They do this out of passion. These are people who love making art, and they view what they do as making art.”

is an indie movement, driven by amateurs and fueled by passion, it tends to attract unrestrained talent willing to explore new ways of maximizing a piece of hardware. After all, an award-winning demoscene project is as much about technical wizardry as artistic proficiency. “These guys think outside the box; they do things that people think aren’t possible,” Rusty says. “So imagine what they can do when they’re given a piece of hardware like [the PS3].”

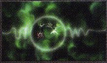
Enter Plastic, a team out of Lodz, Poland. The first in a handful of demoscene groups Rusty is now working with (the others are being kept under wraps), Plastic impressed Rusty with its award-winning demos, and he soon reached out to them. After an initial reaction of “absolute surprise”—after all, plenty of people still think of Sony as “The Man,” and the demoscene is all about independent creations—Plastic jumped on board and began to build the first-ever officially sanctioned PS3 demoscene. Despite their diminutive numbers—the team has eight members total, and only five were working on the project at most times, in-between their day jobs—Plastic didn’t fail to impress Rusty. While their vision and artistry is apparent in the static screens on these pages, perhaps less apparent are some of their astounding technical achievements.

“You know that painted look to everything?” Rusty begins. “That’s actually a shader. That’s all done through code. That’s not texture work. The other really big one is the fur, both on the dog and more importantly the cat that you see. That’s a shader. That’s not geometry. That’s all real-time. High-density fur like that has never been achieved in real-time.” Indeed, Rusty is so impressed with Plastic that they’re already in discussions about doing more with PSN and PS3. (And the same goes for any other demoscene team Rusty is working with: “I’m going to find teams, we’re going to come up with some really cool little projects, and eventually they might get bounced over the fence to doing a big game,” he says.)

Yet despite all the artistry and wizardry in *Linger in Shadows,* Rusty can’t help but be a bit worried. He’s honestly not sure if *Linger* will resonate with the PS3 audience. “It’s going to be a challenge,” he admits. “It’s going to be one of those things that people get or they don’t. I know that.”

Still, if you’re looking for something different that also has the benefit of showcasing the potent processing power of your PS3 along with the visual splendor of that 52-inch HD TV you just spent too much money on, *Linger* might be exactly what you’re seeking. But even if your living room isn’t stocked with the latest high-tech gear, *Linger* is still impressive. “It’s something that people can appreciate that isn’t just a game,” Rusty says. “It is very much something I’d love people to play around with, to explore. It’s a grand experiment.” ■

Risky Business



First came *Everyday Shooter,* an utterly entrancing combination of classic shooter gameplay with sophisticated abstract visuals and progressive aural soundscapes, all of which combine to form something greater than its individual parts. Next came *flOw,* an innovative eat-em-up (yes, “eat”) whose simplicity belies the complex adaptive AI and impressionistic narrative that permeates the game. And now: *Linger in Shadows.* What do these three titles have in common? They were all borne from a sense of exhaustion with the current state of the games industry—and they all come from SCEA’s Santa Monica Studio, under the watchful eye of senior producer Rusty Buchert.

“In some regards, the industry has stagnated,” Rusty sighs. “I’ve been doing this almost 20 years. You look back, there were a lot of times when people were taking risks, and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t, but that’s died off with the cost of big titles. [PSN] is a place where we can go out and do that again. I’ve always looked at this as being a twofold thing: One, preparing people for the future about digital distribution; two, I can wind back the clock fifteen years, when you could take risks and come up with unique, innovative gameplay without the threat of burning down the company. This is where we’re going to find innovation.”

Next up from Rusty and Santa Monica: *Flower,* from *flOw* developer thatgamecompany; a potential new project from *Everyday Shooter* creator Jonathon Mak; and several other possible projects from various demoscene groups. “Part of my job is being a talent scout and trying to sniff out that different, unique thing that I think people should be playing,” Rusty adds. “It’s about experimentation; it’s going out and finding unique experiences that aren’t just lather, rinse, repeat.”

On the Download

Five PSP classics worth picking up on PSN

Some of the best PSP titles can be found in the bargain bin of your local game store, but did you know that you can also download many of those classic hits from the PlayStation Store? Indeed, Sony has made several previous UMD releases available for purchase since last fall, and we've collected our top five picks below.

BY ANDREW HAYWARD

①

LocoRoco

PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** SCE Japan
ORIGINAL RELEASE: September 2006
PRICE: $22.99 **SIZE:** 524MB

WHAT IS IT?

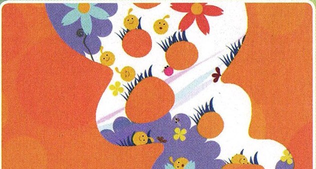
A vibrant 2D platformer in which you tilt the world with the shoulder buttons.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT

This wildly original tale of colorful blob-like creatures that can combine and separate to traverse obstacles remains one of the system's absolute gems. It may not have made a huge commercial splash, but few titles can claim to combine platform action, puzzle-solving, and non-traditional controls into a package more compelling than *LocoRoco*. The infectious music (the wee blobs sing in an invented language) and *über*-cutesy cardboard-cutout visuals might seem more at home in a Sanrio product, but don't let the presentation scare you off—*LocoRoco* packs a legitimate challenge in its 40 campaign stages and includes a heap of unlockable goodies.

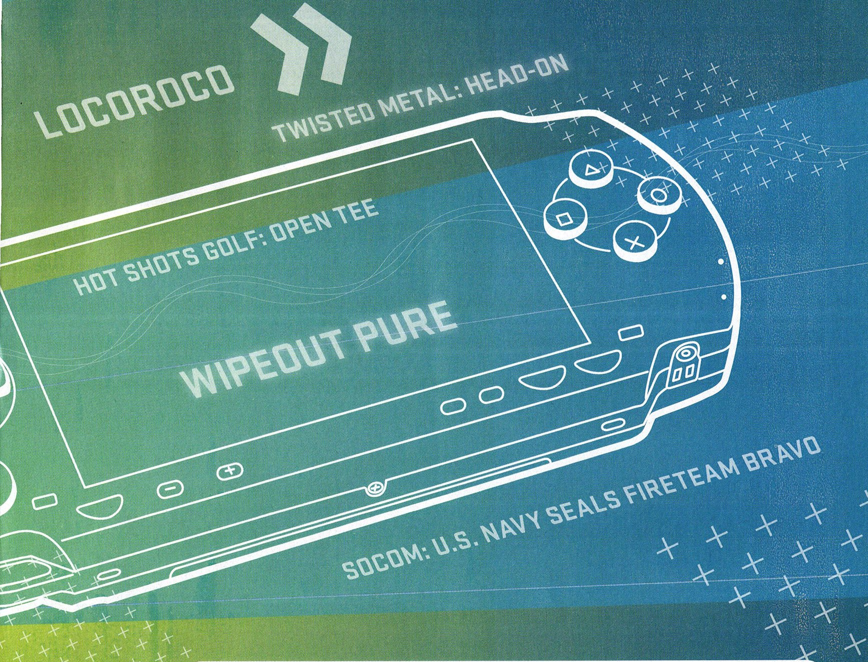
ALSO DOWNLOAD

LocoRoco Cocoreccho!, a PlayStation Network spin-off for PlayStation 3 in which you guide the familiar blobs through an obstacle course.



BONUS!

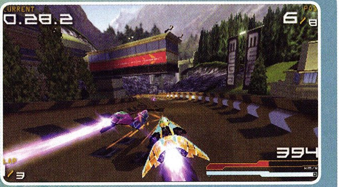
Two of the levels from the campaign are available in the options menu as "Demo Levels," which can be played on your own or shared wirelessly with other players. However, if you beat these levels on your own, you'll unlock two additional levels that aren't included anywhere else in the game!


LOCOROCO
TWISTED METAL: HEAD-ON
HOT SHOTS GOLF: OPEN TEE
WIPEOUT PURE
SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO

2

Wipeout Pure

PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Sony Studio Liverpool **ORIGINAL RELEASE:** March 2005 **PRICE:** $15.99 **SIZE:** 156MB



WHAT IS IT?

A futuristic hovercraft racer with an emphasis on combat.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT

Wipeout Pure reignited Sony's classic anti-gravity racing franchise after the mediocre *Wipeout Fusion* for PlayStation 2 failed to usher the formula into the modern era. *Pure* certainly looks the part, with its stunning frame rate and crisp ships and settings, but more importantly, it plays even better than you'd expect, not allowing the compact screen and tiny analog stick of the portable system to compromise the blistering pace and tight controls that define the *Wipeout* experience. Sure, *Wipeout Pulse* recently upped the ante with online play and an expanded single-player campaign, but *Pure* is still well worth a look for its unique tracks and considerable downloadable content.

ALSO DOWNLOAD

Sony released eight free downloadable content packs for *Wipeout Pure* in the months following its release, essentially doubling the size of the game with new tracks, teams, and music.

BLOCK ROCKIN' BEATS!

An official CD soundtrack for the game was issued in October 2005, featuring contributions from Aphex Twin, Photek, and Stanton Warriors.

The down-low on downloading

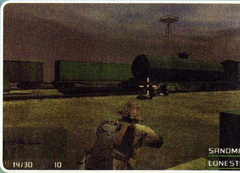
If you're new to the prospect of downloading games from the PlayStation Store, don't fret: It's a relatively painless process. If you already have a PlayStation 3, you can simply navigate to the "Downloadable Games" area of the recently overhauled store, where these games and more will be located in the "PSP Games" subfolder. Once you've purchased, downloaded, and installed the file (on your PS3 hard drive), tether the two platforms together with a USB cable and select "USB Connection" from the PSP Settings tab to transfer the game to the handheld.

Alternatively, you can use reach the PlayStation Store via any PC at http://store.playstation.com, though you'll need to grab the free PlayStation Network Downloader application to download and transfer the files to your PSP.

3

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo

PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Zipper Interactive
ORIGINAL RELEASE: November 2005 **PRICE:** $15.99
SIZE: 405MB



WHAT IS IT?

A tactical third-person military shooter with epic online support.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT

SOCOM had to be the biggest question mark in Sony's console library when it came to the prospect of a PSP version, due to the franchise's fervent online community (and the PSP's spotty online support early on). But *Fireteam Bravo* captures everything that made the previous *SOCOM* games essential online experiences, with 16-player Infrastructure support, 12 available maps, and even voice chat. If network play isn't your thing, the single-player campaign packs more than a dozen missions in locales like Chile and Morocco. Either way, the shooter experience remains among the best on the platform, nearly three years after its release.

ALSO DOWNLOAD

After you've stormed the servers and burned through the extensive list of weapons in *Fireteam Bravo*, hit the PlayStation Store and download *Fireteam Bravo 2* (also $15.99).

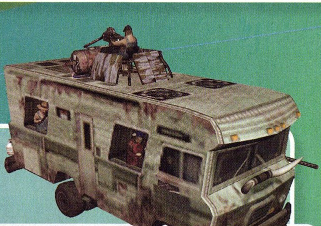
HOOK UP!

Fireteam Bravo links up with *SOCOM 3* on PlayStation 2 via USB cable, allowing progress in the console game to unlock skins and weapons on the PSP.

4

Twisted Metal: Head-On

PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Incognito Entertainment **ORIGINAL RELEASE:** March 2005
PRICE: $15.99 **SIZE:** 311MB



WHAT IS IT?

Vehicular combat with deranged drivers and wireless play.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT

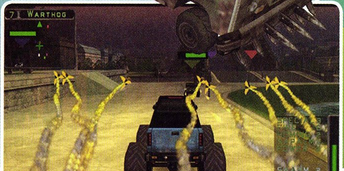
Twisted Metal has survived several development teams and multiple panned PSone entries to become one of Sony's most beloved and enduring franchises. *Head-On* may lack the Mature-rated punch of its PS2 predecessor *Twisted Metal: Black*, but the essential elements of the car combat progenitor are all here. The world tour campaign touches down in Paris and Tokyo, and will have you launching projectiles at computer foes for some time, with an animated ending available for each of the myriad playable characters. Online multiplayer is a key feature, though local wireless play with pals is also a blast.

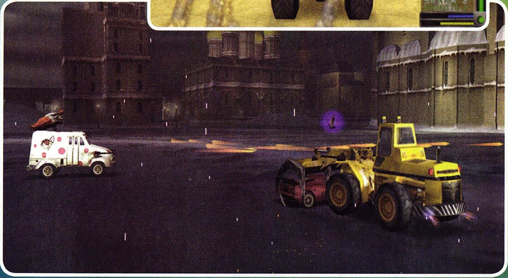
ALSO DOWNLOAD

Twisted Metal 2, first released in 1996 for PSone, is regarded by many as the best in the franchise and is available as a PS3/PSP download for just $5.99.

FUN AFOOT

The Extra Twisted Edition of *Head-On* was released for PlayStation 2 this spring, with additional content and an on-foot mode.



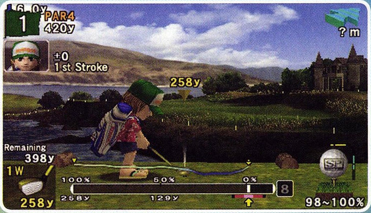


x30/30
x2
Sandman
Lonestar

5

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee

PUBLISHER: SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Clap Hanz
ORIGINAL RELEASE: May 2005 **PRICE:** $15.99 **SIZE:** 441MB



WHAT IS IT?

An accessible golfing simulation that pairs realistic gameplay with whimsical visuals.

WHY IT'S WORTH IT

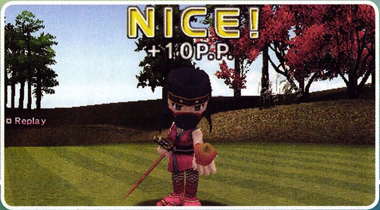
Aside from puzzler *Lumines*, we can't think of a greater time sink from the early days of the PSP. *Hot Shots Golf* honed its winning combination of easy-to-learn gameplay and over-the-top characters over several PlayStation 2 iterations, and *Open Tee*—the first portable release—maintains and expands upon everything that made it a console hit without losing anything in the transition. The extensive campaign will keep you putting for months, wireless Ad hoc support is great for local eight-player matches, and the emphasis on customization (with over 250 unlockable outfit options) means you can assemble the wacky golfer that best represents your inner duffer.

ALSO DOWNLOAD

Once you've dominated the links in *Open Tee*, hit the PlayStation Store to nab a pair of playable demos for *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2*, which debuted in June.

DID YOU KNOW?

A "Coca-Cola Special Edition" of the game (with Coke logos all over the courses) was given away in a Japanese promotion, with just 1,300 copies made.



Is downloading for me?

Why download games that are already available on UMD? Convenience is a plus, as a large Memory Stick Pro Duo can hold several titles without the need to lug around games, and loading times are noticeably shorter with the downloaded versions (especially in *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee*). And while it probably won't give you hours of extra play per each charge, you will gain a significant boost in battery life simply because you won't be spinning a physical disc in your PSP. Finally, we can't discount the noise factor: a spinning disc produces just the right amount of sound to wake a sleeping spouse if you're trying to play in bed—but if you've got the game on your Memory Stick, you can probably get away with an extra hour of playtime past your bedtime!

Aside from the lack of packaging and printed manuals, the primary negative at this point is value. The prices may be lower than the actual MSRP of the physical product, but a quick search online turns up new copies of most titles at lower prices, with used copies offered at even more of a bargain. Ultimately, personal preference will guide most purchases, though there are definite advantages and drawbacks to consider.

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RATINGS

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL**
An excellent game that takes its genre to new heights.

★★★★ **GREAT**
Not flawless, but a truly great game and among the best in its genre.

★★★ **OKAY**
An overall positive experience for fans of the genre or subject matter.

★★ **POOR**
Suffers from several major flaws that really damage the experience.

★ **AWFUL**
Not worth your time or money.

GAME of the month — Madden NFL 09 p 74

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month in PTOM, the world of sport and videogames collide. Now, we're all on the DL.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FAVORITE SPORT: Soccer, because Rob's English and it's required by law.
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Field Hockey, because it's not just for girls (says the former university team captain). Nice skirt, boss.
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *Championship Manager* on PC. Here's to Rob managing his beloved Sheffield United to the bottom ranks of the Premier League. Cheers!

NOW PLAYING: *MGS4* (for the third time), *Battlefield: Bad Company, Madden NFL 09*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

FAVORITE SPORT: Archery, because as Teresa proudly states, "I don't suck at it."
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Ultimate Scrapbooking Championship. Um, that's not a sport, Teresa: "Well, it should be."
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *Chocobo Racing.* Actually, Chocobo's are so adorable Teresa would like them in anything—even soup. Okay, maybe not soup.

NOW PLAYING: *MGS4, Soul Calibur III, Guitar Hero III*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

FAVORITE SPORT: Soccer, because it's a beautiful game that doesn't support commercials.
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Women's Softball, because... "It was on." Care to elaborate on your pick, Ken? "No."
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *FIFA 08 Soccer.* Because according to Ken, those who possess the ability to play, play. While those who lack that ability, manage.

NOW PLAYING: Outdoor men's soccer, *Assassin's Creed, echochrome*

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

FAVORITE SPORT: Basketball, but only the '90s Knicks—when they didn't suck. Mostly.
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Mumblety peg, a game of nerves, skill, and bravado—which explains why Gary doesn't wear sandals.
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *Monster Rancher Hop-A-Bout* on the PSone because it had Pogosticking in it. Pogosticking is fun...bouncy, bouncy, bouncy fun!

NOW PLAYING: *BioShock, MGS4*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

FAVORITE SPORT: Baseball, because it's a metaphor for life and great for taking naps.
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Hurling. It's like rugby with sticks and a ball, played before hordes of drunken crazy Irishmen.
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *Greatest Nine* on Sega Saturn—a great baseball game and the announcer screaming, "Jumping catch!" during pop flies is classic.

NOW PLAYING: *Top Spin 3, GRID*

BUTTERS
ASSISTANT EDITOR

FAVORITE SPORT: Ice Hockey. Scott played for 12 years—so he's got that going for him.
FAVORITE OBSCURE SPORT: Curling. See, Scott doesn't *really* ice skate all that well, but he sweeps just great!
FAVORITE SPORT VIDEOGAME: *Skate.* Scott seems to have some sort of fetish for skating. Skateboarding will have to do until his dream of a disco rollerskating game is finally realized.

NOW PLAYING: *GTA IV*, if he gets his edit in.

Retro View

The big games we were playing this month in PlayStation history.

ONE YEAR AGO...

Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 (PS2)
(9.0 out of 10)

Jeanne d'Arc (PSP)
(9.0 out of 10)

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas (PS3)
(8.5 out of 10)

FIVE YEARS AGO...

Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution (PS2)
(10 out of 10)

Madden NFL 2004 (PS2)
(10 out of 10)

NCAA Football 2004 (PS2)
(10 out of 10)

10 YEARS AGO...

Heart of Darkness (PS1)
(4.5 stars)

C&C Red Alert Retaliation (PS1)
(4 stars)

TOCA Touring Car Championship (PS1)
(4 stars)

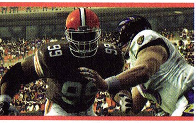
9
54
Tickets Visit jag

PS3 | R

Madden NFL 09

Celebrating 20 years of gridiron domination

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon



You could be forgiven for suspecting that EA's Tiburon studio had forgotten that its cash-cow *Madden* franchise was so named for the staggeringly well respected former coach and current TV pundit. His role within the game had seemed more a nod to history than a practical integration of his keen insight. That's the first element admirably addressed in this anniversary celebration of videogame football excellence. Madden himself kicks off the experience, introducing his IQ method of assessing your personal skills in the core mechanics of rush offense and defense, and pass offense and defense. Armed with this score from performing training drills in a simulator clearly inspired by one too many viewings of *Tron,* the game automatically determines your skill level and adapts itself to your individual abilities.

Of course, in the single game mode (or if you're starting a long-term franchise) you can select one of the four standard difficulty modes rather than selecting "My Skill" and having the AI blend its abilities in each area to give you a (theoretically) competitive game. I add the caveat because I did witness a few odd situations when using My Skill settings. My Raiders intercepting the first two passes of the game (and eventually making five picks on the day) before storming to a 38-7 victory over the Broncos in week one was, well, odd. A few other small glitches in commentary details (saying the score was 14-7 when it was actually 20-7) and Time of Possession stats (that listed a roughly six-digit number!) smelled of a game not quite polished. Now, to be clear, we were playing a non-boxed, near-final version of the game dubbed "reviewable" by EA's reps, so there's a chance these incidents are part of the final bug-squashing plan. But

Though released as its own full-fledged game, the inclusion of *NFL Head Coach 09* in the *Madden NFL 09* Collector's Edition ensures that you have the most complete football playing, managing, watching, and learning package possible.

In our first season (the upcoming season), the Colts beat the Seahawks 27-10 in the Super Bowl. Make your bets now!

in case they're not, they certainly weren't game breakers though they undermined the depth and realism that oozes out of every other aspect of this superb-playing sim.

On the field the action really has never looked better. The fields are crisp and detailed, the use of a camera akin to ESPN's fly-cam perfectly showcases the fluid animations, and the presentation is TV quality. The gameplay itself underscores the coaching theme by illustrating every single detail you could use to be successful right there on the screen. Whether it's the hit stick options, audible plays, receiver route overlays, fake hikes, bluff routes (handy if you're playing with a buddy sitting right next to you), or even certain comments from color analyst Chris Collinsworth, it's hard to get lost despite the sheer volume of options at your fingertips.

Selecting plays is aided by a window that uses the IQ simulator-style software to illustrate how the play should evolve and end up if it all goes to plan. It's a great method of visualizing what can be a dizzying array of play options. Using the Ask Madden feature to select your play helps newbies, particularly on defense where his picks appeared massively more effective than my own (what, for example, is the Hog Buck 3?), until such time as you've got the playbook and route timing down (along with memorized audibles) to call all your own shots.

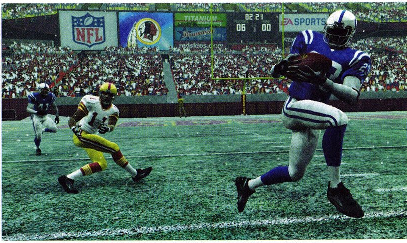
If you blow a play in-game, Collinsworth's backtrack feature will showcase and highlight where you might have missed an open receiver. Even the optional rewind feature, essentially providing mulligans for botched plays, is clearly designed to remove any frustration and encourage practice (and ultimately, success).

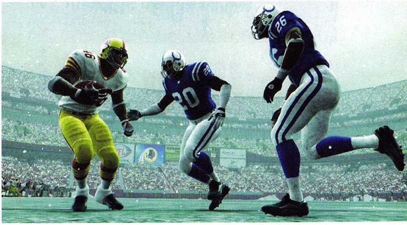
A few features like the *NFL Blitz* X-ray-like injury detail, certain animations, and even the highlighted box in the end zone where you can hit a button to trigger a unique celebration (how did they get *that* past the No Fun League execs?) add more showmanship than depth of content, but do illustrate how detailed the entire experience can get. That goes double if you delve into the franchise mode to manage player contracts, scour their extensive stat charts, and hire and fire coaches and scouts.

We weren't able to try out the full suite of new online features, such as integration with ESPN's Fantasy Football online game that will ultimately allow you to import your fantasy team into the game to play in online matches, but the promise is certainly impressive. As the standalone product *Madden NFL 09* certainly stands up to be counted in this anniversary edition, and though the Collector's Edition may be pricey ($89.99), the inclusion of the full *NFL Head Coach 09* game and retro options to play the 1993 *Madden* rosters make it a no-brainer for football fans. And if this year's incarnation is a reinvention, a launching pad for 2010 and beyond, the *Madden* future is bright, even if the old fella himself is piling on the years!

Rob Smith

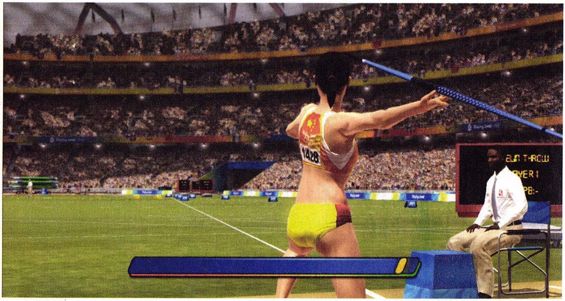
★★★★





Adding a layer to the "realism" is a somewhat excessive number of sponsors, some of which you can add and manage in Franchise mode.

> "Selecting plays is aided by a window that uses the IQ simulator-style software to illustrate how the play should evolve and end up if it all goes to plan."



Speak softly and throw a big stick in one of this game's best events.

Beijing 2008

Olympic spirit isn't enough to earn the gold

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Eurocom

PS3 | R

If the Olympics are all about the spirit of camaraderie, a grand celebration of national pride with people from all walks of life coming together to participate in a massive global event, then *Beijing 2008* totally misses the mark.

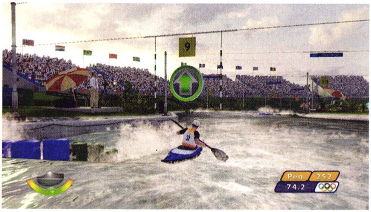
The heart of an Olympics game is the multiplayer mode, and this is exactly where *Beijing* falls short. Certainly, no one expects revolutionary gameplay here—although *Beijing* does pull off the extraordinary feat of incorporating some subtle tweaks into the same old events, breathing an unexpected bit of life into moldy oldies like the javelin throw and the rings. (That said, several of the events utterly fail in execution, and I hate, hate, *hated* the launch trigger for the racing events, which seemed custom-built for false starts or late starts...but nothing in between.)

The problem stems from the clunky interface, constantly recurring intro and outro sequences, long load times, and utterly useless tutorials. This is supposed to be the ultimate in pick-up-and-play casual fun, but when we gathered four eager PTOM editors together for an impromptu game, we spent as much time scrutinizing the obtuse tutorials, watching intros/outros (or yelling at our co-workers to "Hurry the @*&%# up and press X to skip it already!"), waiting for our turns in events when we weren't pitted against each other, and just getting, well...bored. Soon enough, Rob shuffled back to his desk to check his emails, Roger ambled away to edit some pages, Teresa scurried off to play some *PixelJunk*—and I was left trying to convince a group of gaming editors to (gasp!) play a game. Forget online—if this game doesn't work with four friendly players gathered around the same TV, imagine how dull it can be when trying to compete with strangers across the globe.

Ironically, the game actually works better as a single-player offline event. *Beijing* sports a very robust "Olympic Games" mode in which you move through a series of qualifying challenges, leading up to actual competition. Fail to fulfill the criteria of any given day and you'll have to repeat that day; succeed and you'll move forward, with the option of taking some points earned and applying them to various team attributes. It's the perfect way to play an Olympics videogame—in small doses that won't overly tax your button-mashing, stick-waggling muscles.

Gary Steinman

★★½



Rough waters are the least of the problems with the atrocious kayak event.

Medal Ceremony

With 38 events in all, *Beijing* has some real clunkers among the medal winners. PTOM picks the best and worst.

GOLD

RINGS As grueling as the real event, Rings requires you to line up your arms with the analog sticks, then mash the triggers to straighten out, ending with a button-input sequence to stick the landing. Intense!

JAVELIN THROW A near-perfect control sequence in which you run with one analog stick and toss with the other.

WEIGHTLIFTING Another intense test of endurance using the analog sticks to build strength and find your balance.

SILVER

100M The classic footrace deserves mention for giving you the choice between mashing X and Circle or waggling either analog stick. This is what an Olympics game is all about!

HAMMER THROW Another creative use of the analog sticks to follow the hammer's flow before release.

ARCHERY The best of the shooting events, this one is oddly relaxing. Perhaps it's a Zen thing.

BRONZE

CYCLING Build an initial burst of speed, then rotate an analog stick to maintain speed while monitoring the fatigue levels of your four-man team. Your wrists will be sore, but it's worth it!

TABLE TENNIS How could this not be fun? You'll need a few games to get used to it, but then you'll be rallying like a pro.

DIVING – 10M If you can pat your head while rubbing your stomach, you might get a kick out of trying to move the two analog sticks in conjunction with separate indicators.

DID NOT QUALIFY

KAYAK I'm not even gonna explain why this is so bad, because someone might misconstrue what I say and think there's something interesting here. Which would make me sad, because this event is unforgivable.

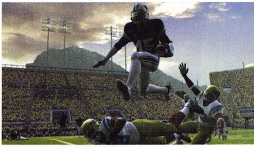
JUDO No matter how many times we tried it, we couldn't get the hang of this event. We were tossed around like rag dolls by our opponents.

BEAM We wanted to like this one, but using colors instead of symbols (X, O, etc.) for the timed sequences was just too counterintuitive.

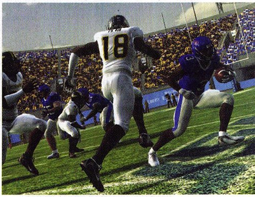
PTOM's art director Ken Bousquet was initially protesting our game (the whole Tibet thing), but then he picked up the controller and broke the world record in javelin on his first try!

HURRICANES

Now you can move your character almost as fast as you can change your mind. Juke, switch direction, and leave your defender chumped and slumped to the turf.



"I believe I can fly..."



More team-specific plays will please die-hard fans.

NCAA Football 2009

EA rekindles the dynasty

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon

Electronic Arts took its sweet time to get college football properly settled on next-gen consoles, but with *NCAA Football 09,* it's fully arrived. It's not only deep in modes—including the long-awaited online dynasty mode—and packed with an electric college atmosphere, but it's also crackling with a new game engine that lights up each tackle, juke, and sack with a visceral responsiveness the series hasn't before.

That responsiveness surfaces in an array of new gameplay-affecting animations that are part of this year's overall improvement. As quarterback, you can pump fake using the right stick to open up a receiver. As running back you'll be able to change direction seamlessly after executing a juke or a stiff arm. On defense, you'll witness dozens of animations that introduce a new level of realism, whether it's a gang tackle or a mid-air collision. Adding to the heightened realism is 60 fps smoothness, giving *NCAA 09* the crisp, sharp look you expect from your PS3.

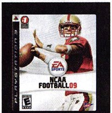
The online dynasty mode is this year's most notable feature addition, delivering a massively deep 60-year endeavor that's playable off or online, against the computer or with as many as 12 people. You can download rosters from EA's online locker or manually customize them, building players up from a draft or by actively recruiting prospects—and all of the real-deal aspects, from red shirting and player stats to NCAA news and custom schedules are at hand. The sheer volume of content to toy with is impressive in its own right, but it's the feeling of control and realism that's so enticing. As a small but worthy side note, many fans will be glad to know EA brought back four-player offline co-op.

NCAA Football 09 offers an abundance of modes, layering in dozens of hours of replay value. Campus Legend—where you build a specific player up from high school post season to the draft and then college—has a singular appeal, while the mini-games, including tug of war, horse, special teams challenge, bowling, and option dash offer a quick shot of fun.

In all, *NCAA 09's* sharp visuals, immediate sense of control, and its robust, fleshed-out modes make this year's version a winner.

Douglass Perry

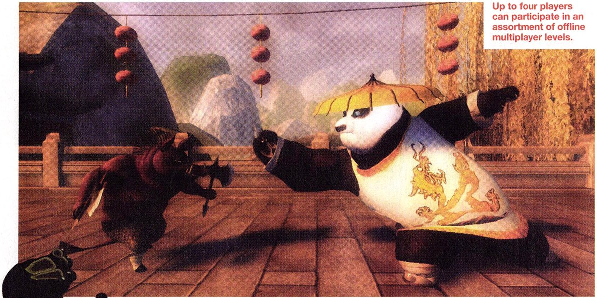
★★★★



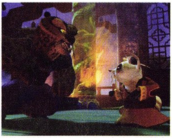
EA ensured that each version of its game got "special treatment," putting a different college player on each system's cover. Boston College Quarterback Matt Ryan appears on the PS3 edition, having completed his career as the school's all-time leader in pass completions.

"Wait... I'll snap it when the cheerleaders are watching."

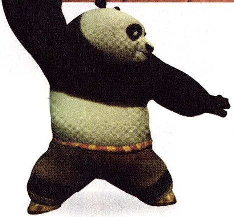
If your quarterback throws an interception, he'll lose composure (i.e. accuracy, powers, etc); by correctly identifying which scheme the defense was playing from three plays the game displays afterward, you can earn some back.



Up to four players can participate in an assortment of offline multiplayer levels.



If you're buying the game for young kids, consider the graphically inferior PS2 version instead. It's ten bucks cheaper for virtually the same game.



Kung Fu Panda

A kung fu title we're gung ho about

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Luxoflux

Animated films juggle two audiences: the kids attracted to the bright colors and fluffy characters and the walking wallets who accompany those kids to the theater (otherwise known as parents). To appease both, a film must be thematically simple enough for kids to comprehend yet clever enough to engage the adults.

A movie-based game has a similar balance to manage: It must retain the movie's flavor and most of its plot, but if it wants to appeal to gamers, those two elements must then be fashioned into playable, engaging levels. Easier said than done, as evidenced by the surfeit of movie-based mediocrity buzzing around in our game-o-sphere. Did *Kung Fu Panda* succeed in surviving the transition from film to game? Unexpectedly, yes, it did.

Plot holes—which riddle most movie-based games, possibly as a ploy to lure players to the film—are non-existent in the *Kung Fu Panda* game. As I led Po (and occasionally Master Shifu and Master Monkey) through a variety of missions across lakes, villages, and mountainsides, I never had to question why I was doing what I was doing, whether it was saving tortoise babies from malicious crocodiles (a smooth, Easter Egg Hunt platforming level) or rescuing Tigress from Tai Lung's cohorts (by shooting a ballista at enemies from across a cliff). The diversity of gameplay modes (from flying missions to navigating gauntlet-like obstacle courses) and mission goals all made sense in the context of the story.

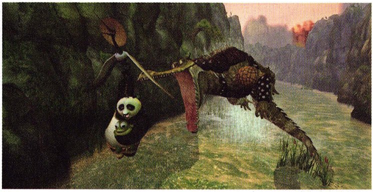
More impressively, the combat works. The controls are smooth and responsive, allowing me to easily transition from one combo to another. Square is fast attack; Triangle is strong attack, X is jump; Circle is grab; and L2 is block. Combinations of those moves result in chain attacks or special moves that cost Chi. My favorite move is Master Shifu's X-X-Circle, a combo that let me stomp on enemies' heads continuously as long as I kept tapping Circle. (The same command sequence initiated an area-wide ground pound for Po and a tail swing attack for Master Monkey.)

It's rare for a movie tie-in game to keep me entertained throughout its duration; it's even rarer for one to evoke in me a desire to see a film I'd previously shrugged off. But *Kung Fu Panda* managed to accomplish both. The game's only major flaw is it's length—the single-player can be completed in a paltry four to six hours—but still, it's definitely worth purchasing for the kids.

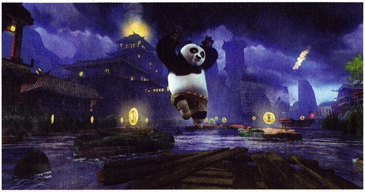
Teresa Dun

★★★½

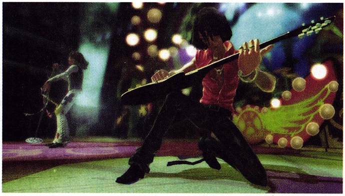
In Chinese, *"kung fu"* can refer to any skill or accomplishment earned through years of strenuous work. Does that mean we can say we have *kung fu* in videogame playing?



Dodge the croc by anticipating its attacks. Hint: watch the croc's head before he leaps out of the water—if you don't, you won't react in time.



Ain't nothing like a good hop across a treacherous river amidst cannon fire. See the boat in the background? Don't blow it up. Really, don't. You'll regret it.



Yes, there's one boss battle and it's against Joe Perry. But if you beat him, he becomes a playable character you can purchase in The Vault.

Guitar Hero:
Aerosmith

The Bad Boys of virtual rock

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ($99.99 with guitar) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: RedOctane
DEVELOPER: Neversoft

If you know the zodiac sign of each member of Aerosmith and can lip sync to all of the group's songs, then you'll eat up this *Guitar Hero III* spin-off like a giddy schoolgirl. *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* retraces the band's career through six new venues, with commentary from the band interspersed throughout. Forty songs (22 by Aerosmith) let you indulge in Aerosmith-flavored rock, but that single-mindedness is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, Aerosmith has some solid guitar solos and catchy melodies that are a delight to play, especially with the generous helping of finger-twisting hammer-ons scattered through the Normal, Hard, and Expert difficulty levels. On the other hand, the game lacks variety because, well, it's predominantly a one-band show.

In the end, it's still *GHIII*. But for the same price, you get fewer songs and no co-op career (though the other *GHIII* modes remain intact, including multiplayer co-op, battle, face-off, and pro face-off, both online and off). If your wall is smothered with Aerosmith posters, you're going to want this game anyway. But if you're just a *Guitar Hero* fan desiring a new song roster, we suggest waiting for the price to drop ten or twenty bucks before picking this up.

Teresa Dun

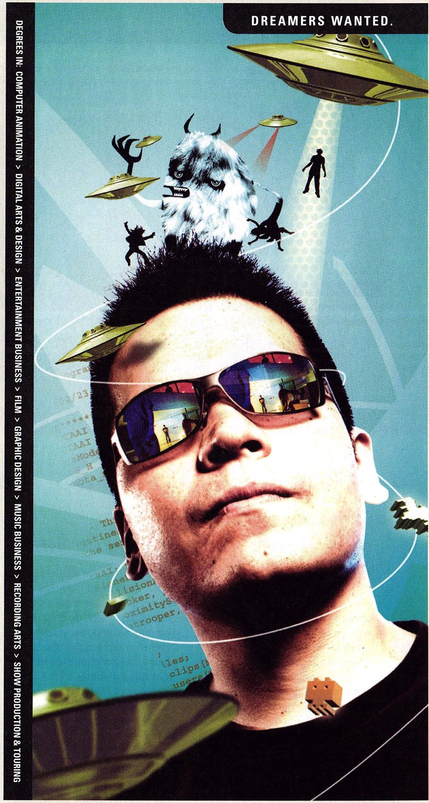
★★★½

Our favorite songs to play? *Pink, Movin' Out, Rag Doll*, and *Walk This Way*, on Hard or Expert of course! [Okay, we admit we had to practice a few times to beat them.]

The Non-Aerosmith Song List

- **Dream Police** (Cheap Trick)
- **All the Young Dudes** (Mott the Hoople)*
- **I Hate Myself for Loving You** (Joan Jett and the Blackhearts)
- **All Day and All of the Night** (The Kinks)*
- **Complete Control** (The Clash)
- **Personality Crisis** (New York Dolls)*
- **She Sells Sanctuary** (The Cult)
- **King of Rock** (Run DMC)
- **Hard to Handle** (The Block Crowes)*
- **Always on the Run** (Lenny Kravitz feat. Slash)
- **Cat Scratch Fever** (Ted Nugent)
- **Sex Type Thing** (Stone Temple Pilots)

*Covers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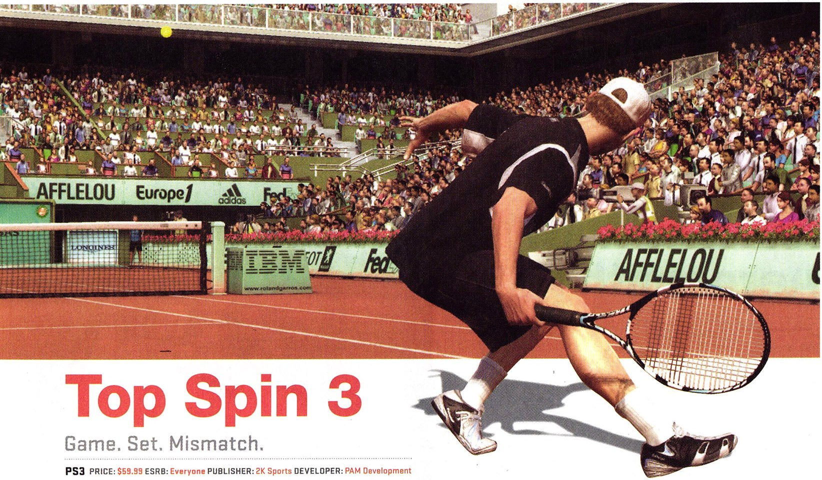
The action in *Top Spin 3* appears realistic, but the deliberate character animations aren't receptive to on-the-fly decision changes when playing a shot.



Anna Kournikova is not in *Top Spin 3*. She probably shouldn't have been on the real-life Professional Tour either, but we're still sad.

Top Spin 3

Game. Set. Mismatch.

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: PAM Development

The release of *Top Spin 3* finally delivers to the PS3 enough tennis games to contest a center court championship showdown. The polished year-old veteran, *Virtua Tennis 3,* offers an accessible arcade-style experience while *Top Spin 3* looks to distinguish itself with a more in-depth, hardcore gameplay focus. But in this case, more hardcore does not translate into more fun.

Top Spin comes well-equipped with an exhibition mode for singles or doubles match play and a tournament mode that lets you play as, and test your mettle against, a wide-range of contemporary stars and legends ranging from Roger Federer and Maria Sharapova to Björn Borg and Monica Seles. The challenging Career mode lets you take your Create-A-Player avatar and move up the ranks from neighborhood court to the professional tour. Each mode provides plenty of variety and challenge, but if you need more, online options serve up individual matches or World Tour play.

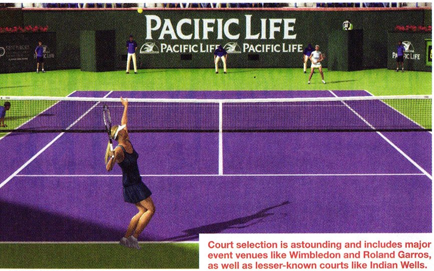
If you expect to jump right in to entertaining rallies, think again. Completing the Top Spin School tutorial is essential, as the difficulty curve seems to begin at hard and round its way up to impossible. But once you learn the intricate control system and get a feel for the unique play rhythm, you'll learn to appreciate the game's inherent depth and comprehensive shot scheme. Of course, while you may appreciate the control system we can't guarantee you'll love it.

In real tennis, the pre-shot preparatory process is seamless, instinctive, and culminates with a simultaneous mental and physical release as the racket smashes into the ball. *Top Spin,* like *Virtua Tennis,* employs a system where shots execute upon releasing, rather than initiating, a button-press. But whereas *VT* feels natural and responsive, *Top Spin's* play seems mired in syrup. The deliberate routine feels like you're constantly waiting for an inputted action to complete—the result being a complex control system that allows you to tactically or strategically determine shots to play from your repertoire, but one that feels detached, and even clumsy if you want to diverge from your initial shot impetus. The focus on the set-up and preparation for shots may be realistic, but the game's "tennis chess" focus leeches much of the sport's integral energy and spontaneity.

While *Top Spin* does redefine the depth-level of tennis videogames, its complexity is ultimately a barrier rather than an avenue to a superior gameplay experience. Hardcore tennis fans may enjoy the practice and repetition necessary to master the game, but most gamers will be frustrated by the tedious process of acquiring that expertise.

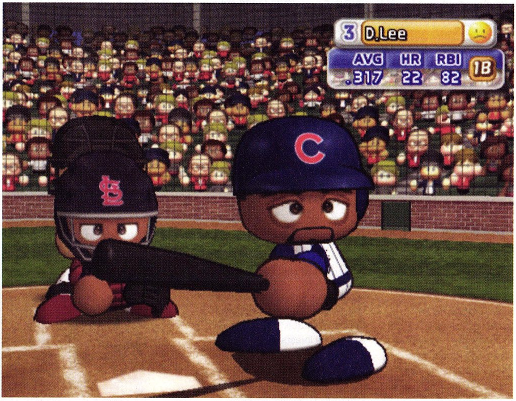
Roger Burchill

★★★

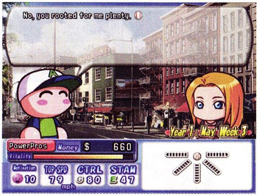


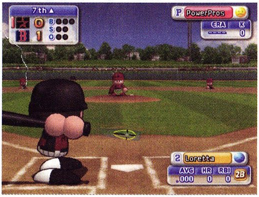
Court selection is astounding and includes major event venues like Wimbledon and Roland Garros, as well as lesser-known courts like Indian Wells.

One of *Power Pros'* **most endearing** features is the hilariously bad commentating. Who knew hearing about Paul "Kur-neck-oh" could be so entertaining?



Some players can look surprisingly like their real-life counterparts, even down to a few signature stances, like Jim Thome extending his bat before he settles in.


No, you rooted for me plenty.



Batting is more precise than you'd think; good batters can direct shots.

MLB Power Pros 2008

Who knew baseball could be so adorable?

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: 2K Sports DEVELOPER: Konami

Baseball, however you look at it, just isn't cute enough. Thank goodness *MLB Power Pros 2008* is here to rectify the situation. Mashing together an odd mix of sports and roleplaying elements, *Power Pros* presents all your favorite MLB teams, ballparks, and most of its players in the kind of bigheaded, big-eyed visual style that you just don't see enough of in sports games.

The game comes from Japan, of course, where the series has been running for nearly 15 years, before finally hitting the U.S. last year. Why else would it include an extensive story mode in which you intersperse games and practice with part-time jobs, childhood flashbacks, dates, encounters with ghosts, and long walks in the country?

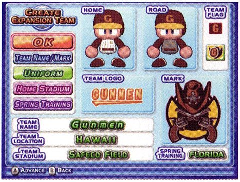
Surprisingly, the game also includes some fairly serious baseball underneath all the cuteness. Now, don't get me wrong: As a simulation of the sport, *Power Pros* can't really stand up to... well, any other game of the last 10 years, actually. But an unexpectedly robust batting interface and reasonably solid pitching make this more than kindergarten-level tee ball. Sure, fielding is pretty awful; the fielder auto-select is glitchy, and trying to jump or dive for a ball is an exercise in frustration. But the game's more serious than it looks, which can make the variety of career modes more entertaining than you might expect. You can spend your time managing a team in Season mode, living the life of a Major League hopeful in MLB Life mode, or working through a fictional minor league in the story-based Success mode—all distinct experiences.

Unfortunately, the game is plagued by so many awful design and interface choices that each of these modes feels like a chore in its own way. Each game, practice session, and conversation includes an absurd amount of pointless, time-wasting, interstitial screens, each crammed full of incomprehensible and/or insignificant data. Do I really need to know my "Timely Whiff" rating? Or what my Style level is? I know baseball is all about statistics, but come on!

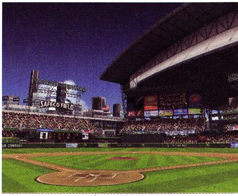
I think if I hadn't already seen the deep career modes of Sony's recent MLB offerings, I might be more inclined to recommend *Power Pros.* But as it is, the game feels like a clumsy attempt to meld sport and story, and doesn't manage either particularly well. It's cute and quirky as hell. It's just not that good.

Joe Rybicki

★★½


Team Name: Gunmen
Team Location: Hawaii
Team Stadium: Safeco Field
Spring Training: Florida

If the full MLB roster doesn't float your boat, you can build your own team from scratch.



The realistic ballparks would look at home in any other MLB game.

METAL GEAR ONLINE

TIPS AND TACTICS FOR MGO MASTERY

After one year of waiting, stealth goes live again

Metal Gear Online might be new to the PS3's online roster, but it wasn't born yesterday. The series' previous forays into multiplayer combat were all preparations for the game in our hands.

Comparing the three versions sounds like a retelling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. The original game for the PS2 lacked customized gameplay, and the PSP's *Portable Ops* only allowed six players per game. Both were too hot and too cold in different ways. With detailed levels that hold up to sixteen combatants, the new *MGO* offers an experience much closer to "just right."

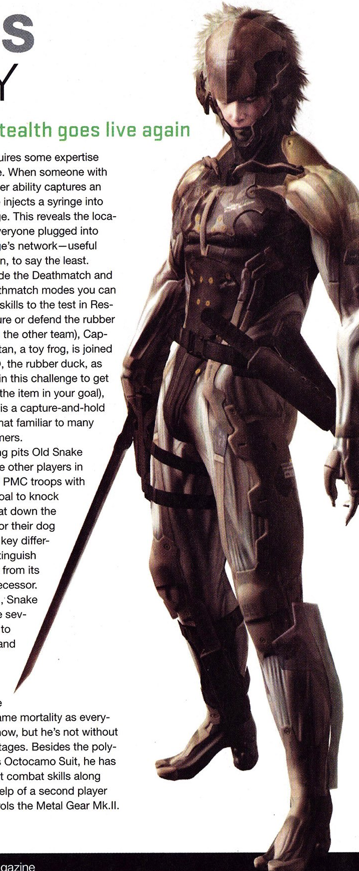
Each player starts with a weak skill set, but those skills improve if you make it your focus. Most players improve their combat skills first. Weapons mastery shortens reload times and steadies a gun's aim while firing, and other skills increase the zoom in first-person view or the lock-on distance of Auto-aim.

Other skills take advantage of *MGO's* unique slant on multiplayer combat: the SOP System, which you'll recognize from the single-player story. The SOP tells each soldier the location and status of each comrade. When walls separate two members on the same network, they appear as blue or red silhouettes through the obstacles.

Players who equip SOP Skills can alert their team to the locations of attackers, prey, and traps. None illustrates their usefulness more than the Scanner ability, which requires some expertise to execute. When someone with the Scanner ability captures an enemy, he injects a syringe into his hostage. This reveals the locations of everyone plugged into his hostage's network—useful information, to say the least.

Alongside the Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes you can put these skills to the test in Rescue (capture or defend the rubber duck from the other team), Capture (Kerotan, a toy frog, is joined by GA-KO, the rubber duck, as the "ball" in this challenge to get and keep the item in your goal), and Base is a capture-and-hold game format familiar to many online gamers.

Sneaking pits Old Snake against the other players in the role of PMC troops with Snake's goal to knock out and pat down the enemies for their dog tags. Two key differences distinguish this mode from its PS2 predecessor. Back then, Snake could take several slugs to the brain and still grind down his enemies. Old Snake has the same mortality as everyone else now, but he's not without his advantages. Besides the polymorphous Octocamo Suit, he has maxed out combat skills along with the help of a second player who controls the Metal Gear Mk.II.



Building Your Team

Winning *MGO* largely depends upon teamwork. Your chances are better if you're with a group of familiar players, but you can still contribute to the victory of a random group. Figure out your preferred play style, and equip the Combat Skills that will best help you help your team. Here are some sample skill combos to give you an idea.

GROUND PATROL

Equip Quarterback, an SOP Skill, and a Gun Skill. The Quarterback Skill lets you throw grenades farther, which becomes useful when your enemies have gotten snug in place. If you can coordinate the members in your Ground Patrol, have each player equip a different SOP Skill to broaden the type of info exchanged.

SNIPER

Equip Sniper+ along with the SOP Skills Monomania and Sixth Sense. The second will show your Ground Patrol the location of the one that got away. Sixth Sense will show you where traps have been laid, and you can snipe them before they catch your team.

SCOUT

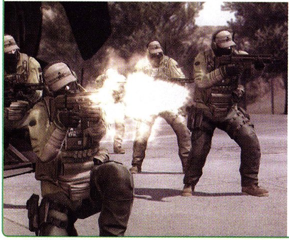
Equip CQC+, Scanner, and Runner. Scouts will likely operate solo, so they'll want to move fast. Their goal is to snag one of the enemies, hack the other team's network, and show the Ground Patrol and Snipers alike where to attack.

SECURITY GUARD

Equip Trickster, Runner, and Monomania. Security Guards should work in pairs. They hide in their team's spawning area to make sure that the enemy doesn't make a spawn camp nest. Additionally, they can serve as SOP terminals after players respawn. Connecting to one soldier links you to everyone linked to him, and reconnecting with everyone on your team after respawning can be difficult. Security Guards can function both as spawn camper insurance and SOP hubs.

Interface Tactics

The Start and Select buttons can prove as valuable as the trigger button in *MGO.* Here are some often-overlooked aspects of *MGO's* interface that can help give you the advantage.



INSTANT FPV

In your Gameplay Options menu, select the category titled "Camera Direction After Switch." Enable the third option, "First Person View Memory." Afterwards, when you switch to FPV once, you'll go into FPV automatically when you ready your weapon.

MAPQUEST

Press Start during a match and bring up the Game Menu. Open the Map. While the Map is displayed, press Start again. Afterward, when you press Start, the game will take you straight to the Map, and you won't need to navigate through the Game Menu.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Press the Select button at the Weapon Select screen before you respawn. After the menu disappears, use the right analog stick to survey the area. Scanning your surroundings before you respawn can help you get the jump on intruders in your base.

The Box and the Drum

As Snake has long noted, wise soldiers use the box well. With *MGS4,* we might say the same of the drum. Here are some tips on how to make the most of your exterior arsenal.

1. Running with a heavy weapon will slow your soldier's pace. Equip the box to cancel the weight of your weapon and get a small boost.
2. The box will protect you from Stun grenades, but explosives will blow it to shreds. Only one box per life! Take care of them both.
3. Equip the box to momentarily break the enemy's Auto-aim.
4. Magazines won't affect you if you're running inside the box.
5. If you happen to catch fire, equip the box to douse the flames.
6. Unequip the drum after you've hit your target. This will usually stop your soldier from vomiting.
7. With the drum equipped, stand by explosive barrels to blend into the environment.
8. Rolling in the drum can serve as a good distraction. Draw the enemy's fire while your comrades draw their blood.
9. Use the drum as a trap. Prep by pressing and holding the X button. Wait for someone to walk by, and press the left analog stick toward him to begin rolling. This works more often than impromptu use in a gunfight.
10. Have a buddy lay cover fire while you're rolling. He can pick off the enemies that you bowl over.

Sneaking Mission Tactics

OLD SNAKE

Activate the Face Camo (located in your Items Inventory) immediately. It gives you a 99-percent Camo Index, and it hides Snake's head from the ENV Goggles.

Don't snag your victims in wide-open spaces or in places with heavy fighting. Snake works better against a handful of soldiers in an area that he can control. Hunt in some place enclosed, like a corridor or a side junction.

Don't collect dog tags right away. They disappear from your inventory if you die, but they'll stay on the map until the end of the round. Get three tags on the map over the course of a few lives and collect them all at once.

MK.II

Remember that the Mk.II is half of a duo. Find and support Snake!

Lag can make the Mk.II's attacks miss in open areas. Ambush enemies as they run through doorways instead.

Hold the attack button to keep the Mk.II's arm extended if you attack too soon. Think of it as a high-voltage tripwire.

PMC players can locate Snake with the ENV Goggles. Hunt them down! The Mk.II can't equip them, but they'll stay out of enemy hands in your inventory.

If you can't seem to stun anyone at all, think of other ways to support Snake. Use the Mk.II as a lure or distraction.

PMC

Learn Snake's spawn locations and check there first.

Snake's breath and his shadow will appear even if he's fully camouflaged. Stay sharp for those give-aways!

Capture Mission Tactics

USE STUN TACTICS TO immobilize the enemy in their goal area. It will keep them asleep, and it will force them to approach you through the shortest (and most predictable) route.

EMBED ONE OF YOUR teammates near the enemy's goal. Steady assaults can weaken their defense when they've got the football in bounds.

STEAL THE OTHER TEAM'S football and throw a Chaff grenade. However, don't take it back to your team's goal. Run to your spawn area and hide in a dumpster. To be extra obnoxious, have one of your teammates mine the place with Claymores, Sleep Bombs, or Magazines. Your opponents will have to penetrate your team's spawn area and disarm the traps before they can open the dumpster—and then they have to contend with you!

Base Tactics

LEAVE ONE PERSON TO defend each captured base. If the host has activated DP, you'll earn 250 DP for every four seconds that you physically occupy the goal.

BE AWARE THAT, AFTER you've protected your base from the other team's assault, you'll need to occupy it briefly before it has completely returned to your team's control. Keep making them earn it!

PLAY POSSUM. WHILE YOU'RE occupying a base, lie prone and hold the Triangle button. This is especially useful after a large firefight. Many will assume that your dead body hasn't disappeared for your respawn. Use that mistake to take them by surprise.

GamesRadar.com Top 7...

Bad guys you didn't want to kill

The gaming murders that left a bad taste in our mouths

The Colossi

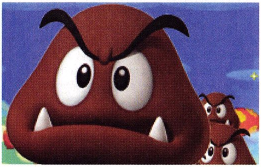
Shadow of the Colossus

Most of these huge beasts are just minding their own business and only attack once provoked. Colossus 13 doesn't even retaliate, instead merely attempting to shake you off. They clearly feel pain too - stab them in the head and you'll know about it. Come on, one of them's even got a cool beard, yet you still killed it, didn't you? It's dead now. You did it. Shame on you.

Wanna read more?

- Stereotypical gamers we hate
- Gaming nudity you didn't notice
- Secret shame games

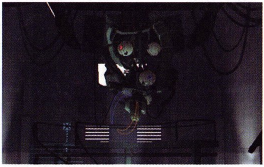
Head to:
gamesradar.com/top7



Goombas

Super Mario Bros.

If you stand still and they hit you, you die, but then that's true of buses and you don't go around stamping on them. You only get 100 points per kill too - the gaming equivalent of a $5.00 whole chicken. Has life really become so discounted?



GLaDOS

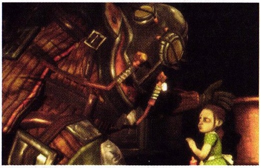
Portal

Just as hostages can come to bond with their captors, so you end up liking GLaDOS - the female-voiced computer in Portal, the Best Game Ever Made (TM). Guilt for killing her is prolonged because you have to do it a piece at a time. While she talks to you. (Sniff.)

Orbinaut

Sonic the Hedgehog

After these critters toss their spikes they're just cute, marshmallowy-looking creatures that just stare and slowly move forwards. They're now totally harmless. Are you really such a bastard that you'd kill them? Yep, us too. But we felt dirty afterwards.



Big Daddies

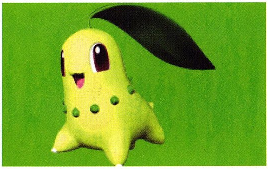
BioShock

They're huge, ugly, armed with a massive drill and turn violent with only the smallest provocation, but the Big Daddies still make us sad when they die. They're only protecting their Little Sister after all. 'Wake up, Mr Bubbles?' Sorry, ain't gonna happen.

Spotty Bulorb

Pikmin

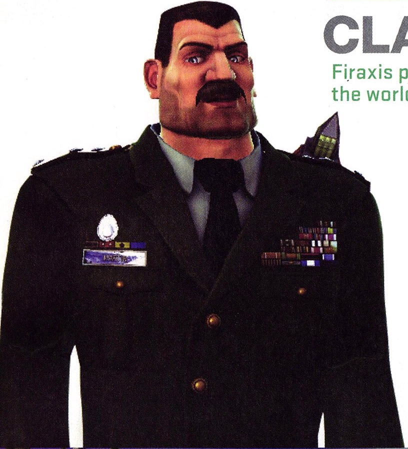
This is the angry mob lynching of gaming, The Spotty Bulorb is surrounded in its sleep, worn down and then killed. While its children watch! Or maybe you killed them first? OK, so it's just like nature. But nature can be so cruel.



Level 1

Pokemon

You've been playing for ages and you run into a low-level Pokemon. That's when you realise your super-powered team of fighters has become a remorseless unit. What chance does a level 2 Pidgey have against your level 67 Glaceon?



NATION BUILDING 101

CLASH OF THE CIVS

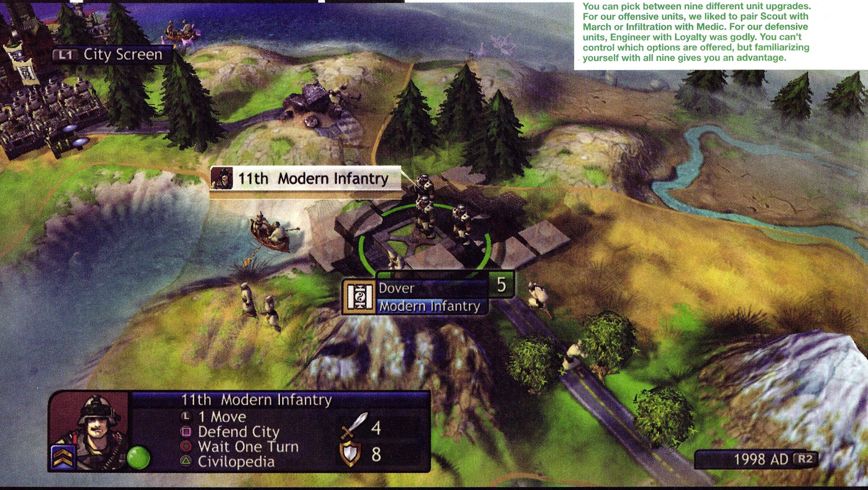
Firaxis provides six insider tips to help you rule the world in *Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution*

It's the first time a real-time strategy game has ever been released on the PS3, so we understand if you're a little stumped by *Civilization Revolution.* Sure, you can dominate the computerized competition on the easier difficulty levels, but can you do it on King, Emperor, or Deity? If you can, send us your tips! If not, then dive into some helpful advice provided by Barry Caudill, Executive Producer at Firaxis. Read, learn, and then go take over the *Civilization* world.

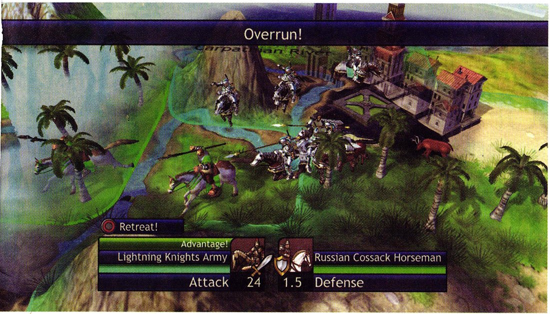
TIP 1

Know your Civ

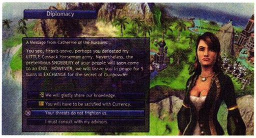
Even though there are no penalties for choosing a particular Civ, it's important to know what your Civ will be especially good at, so you can make good decisions on the strategies you choose. For instance, cultural players might choose Rome for their wonder building abilities, but they could also choose the Aztecs because they also get a science boost for temples. Knowing the Civs will also help you to know what to expect from your opponents and how to hone your strategies accordingly. If you start next to the Arabs you may want to either hit them extremely early or wait until they switch governments later in the game.



You can pick between nine different unit upgrades. For our offensive units, we liked to pair Scout with March or Infiltration with Medic. For our defensive units, Engineer with Loyalty was godly. You can't control which options are offered, but familiarizing yourself with all nine gives you an advantage.



Build your cities on hills or next to water for a defense boost. Enemy attacks suffer when their forces have to travel uphill or across a river (remember the Rivendell river ford scene in *LOTR: The Fellowship of the Ring?)* to reach you. Guess "city upon a hill" isn't just a motto for Puritans from the 1600s.


Diplomacy
We will gladly share our knowledge.
You will have to be satisfied with Currency.
Your threats do not frighten us.
I must consult with my advisors.

A Message from Catherine of the Russians...

You see, firaxis-steve, perhaps you defeated my LITTLE Cossack Horseman army. Nevertheless, the pretentious SNOBBERY of your people will soon come to an END. HOWEVER, we will leave you in peace for 5 turns in EXCHANGE for the secret of Gunpowder.

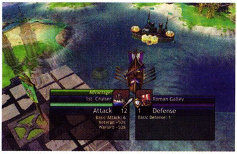
City Screen
Diplomacy
1475 AD

City Screen
Diplomacy
London
13th Tank Army
Lightning Tank Army
30
18
1998 AD

Be careful where you build your cities. Every city should have some food production or else that city's population won't grow fast enough!

TIP 2
Specialize your cities

In previous versions of *Civilization* on the PC you could easily make lots of cities and each of them could basically have the same build orders and still function well. *Civilization Revolution* is different because the costs of buildings and wonders will force you to make more interesting choices. Another thing to consider is you can only have one of a given type of great person settled in any city. I believe the best approach for navigating this situation is to make specialist cities. Rather than trying to have a barracks in every city just build it in one and then use roads to distribute troops throughout your realm. Find a location on the water with some bonus resources and make that a gold or science city. Fill it with a great person, a library, and a university as time goes on and watch your science bar fill up—add wonders like the Colossus or Oxford University and you may find yourself making several hundred beakers per turn. There are actually many such combinations (like David and a barracks for automatic upgrades) just waiting to be discovered.



Except for submarines, all water units can carry an unlimited amount of troops. Be careful though, if your ship is defeated with all your units on board...

TIP 3
Make creative use of upgrades

Unit upgrades are very useful but make sure you think about which ones you choose and especially be aware of how you put the units together into armies. Remember that if any of the units that will be combined into an army are veteran or have an upgrade then the whole army will get the benefit even if the other units are fresh recruits. This is especially important when playing as Germany because you can make more elite armies and then they will all upgrade when you get to the next replacement unit. Having 10 elite knight armies upgrade to elite tank armies with the discovery of Combustion could mean game over for some unlucky opponent. Also be careful of your choice of upgrade because the two you are choosing between are randomly provided. Make sure to have a plan for which units will be support units and which ones will be your city bashers.

TIP 4
Strive to be the first to a tech

Sometimes it pays to deviate from your plan and research something that is available that you can also be first to get. You can tell that you might be first when there is a "1" in the lower right corner of the tech box in the planner. Being first usually gets you something cool for your efforts like getting a building or a great person. It also gives you a tech that no one else has, so you can take that opportunity to sell it to rich opponents or to hold it to bargain for peace.

TIP 5
Don't underestimate the power of naval support

I like to have fleets of ships positioned around all my coasts to both limit the number of enemy troop transports to my land as well as to provide support to my units defending in my cities. I also direct my fleets to sit right outside cities I am attacking (hopefully on top of a resource so they can't use it) to add support to my sieges.

TIP 6
Make every turn count

Any time I see the "Press to End Turn" prompt I wait and examine the entire map, the positions of all of my units especially those vulnerable to attack, and the production status of all my cities. I make sure that everything is absolutely ready for the next turn. This technique adds some time to your gameplay experience and it does presume that you don't mind a little helpful micromanagement, but it is absolutely essential if you want to start winning the game on the highest difficulty levels. After all, honing your abilities in single-player is the best way to make sure you will be ready for the challenge when you make the leap to multiplayer. ■

ONLINE STARDOM

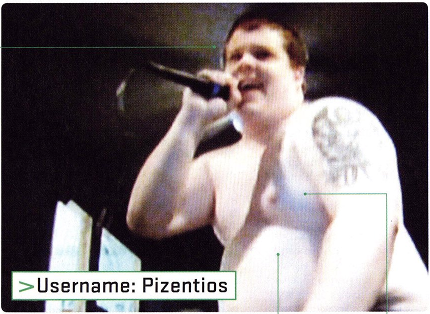
HOW TO BECOME A SINGSTAR SUPERSTAR

Our guide to online musical fame and fortune...well, fame, anyway

THE KEY TO *SINGSTAR'S* APPEAL IS MAKING A SPECTACLE OF YOURSELF TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY, but if impressing (or embarrassing) acquantances is too small a stage for your performance ambitions, it's time to take your act online.

As a *SingStar* believer, you've explored My SingStar Online by now and viewed the video evidence. But like the real music biz, talent alone won't garner the adoration you crave. After all, what good is a flawless vocal rendition when nobody clicks on your video because your 1"x1" icon consists of a photo of you in your sweats sitting on (yet another) faux-leather beige couch? You've got about a nano-second to capture the audience's imagination and then a microsecond to keep their attention.

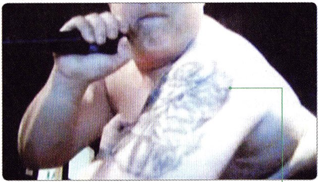
Thanks to PTOM's in-depth research, and the trailblazing examples of select *SingStar* veterans, we've got the sure fire tips to attract and intrigue your potential legion of new fans. The rest is up to you.



Bring It!

Oh, it's been b-rotten!

When creating your *SingStar* video, always be cognizant of the image you're projecting. A dynamic pose is one of the fundamental components of a superstar performance—use your body language to communicate your energy. Once you've intrigued your audience, you've won half the battle. The key is to keep the love train rollin' through the rest of your performance. Don't be shy; don't be self-conscious; and most of all, don't be mediocre. It doesn't really matter if you're performance is good, bad, or weird; being forgettable is the only true crime.

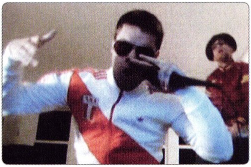


Lighting effects are a great way to add visual distinction. The "crown" effect evidenced here is actually produced by a ceiling fan.

Don't be afraid to play with camera angles. Unique view perspectives can add drama, tension, and flair to your video. Some angles can even be, er...slimming.

Going topless means you're serious about your art. Unfortunately, this is a guys-only option as female exhibitionism is subject to moderation.

Use every visual asset at your disposal. When Pizentios accents his performance with a close-up of his tattoo and an emphatic, *"Bam!"*—we believe.



USERNAME: RZAVWA

Music and fashion go hand-in-hand. You don't have to be super fancy, but try and create some kind of look besides a dirty t-shirt. Rzavwa always bring a high level of energy to their performances, but they also know that proper attire enhances the presentation. We care, because they care.

USERNAME: KELENI

Accessorize, accessorize, accessorize. Keleni's charming sombrero is an eye-catching accent for her rendition of Cosmo-4's Adios Amigos. But attitude is the best accessory—her flirty interplay with the camera perfectly complements her admirable vocal performance.

USERNAME: GAMEOVERGREGGY

Add an extra dimension to your performance by utilizing depth of field. Greggy's vocals might be forgettable, but his vigorous hand thrusts make his unabashed interpretation noteworthy. We don't understand why he's wearing a Ghostbusters costume, but that's just the kind of schtick that makes fans yearn to learn more.

Roger's embarassingly favorite *SingStar* song: Scissor Sisters' I Don't Feel Like Dancing. "I don't want to dance, but it makes me dance! Make it stop!"

Muppet Madness

Watch where you put those hands!

Maybe it's the brainwashing indoctrination to puppets that's universally inflicted on toddlers, but if there's a sock with eyes illustrating an icon, you can be sure that 99.9-percent of the audience will be compelled to click on it. The other 0.1-percent are those who grew up without television or believe that the Muppets were spawns of Satan. Whatever the case, it's good to reconnect with your happy hand friend who helped you through all those lonely, awkward years.

1 Lip-synching is key in puppetry. Remember, you're not merely hopping around with your hand up some plushy's butt, you're creating the illusion of life in an inanimate object. Pay particular attention to the labial cadence and enunciation of your puppet for the best effect.

2 Pay attention to your background. This backdrop is busy but generally unobtrusive, and it's neat—which is more than we can say about most of your living rooms! Listen to your mom for once and pick up your mess—you're on the Internet for god's sake!

1
2
>Username: Alex_Art

USERNAME: SUPER-NOOB

If this looks like a spawn of Satan to you, consider using cute children or pets as guaranteed attention-grabbing alternates. *"Cookie...cookie! Me sing song for cookie!"*

USERNAME: NCAGE

It's one thing to spend your Saturday nights playing *SingStar* alone. It's another thing entirely when you're spending Saturday nights playing the game with your puppet.

USERNAME: DRCOOSE

DrCoose's ensemble is neither meat nor cheese, but they do qualify as puppets. Multi-puppet synchronization does require an extra level of expertise and innovation.

Strangers In the Night

Be afraid. Be very afraid...

If pure talent isn't in your repertoire, then it's time to play the weirdo card. Like rubberneckers slowing down to view an accident on the *SingStar* highway, people will be unable to resist taking a peek.

1 Make-up can enhance your appearance, but eye shadow should *never* extend above your sunglasses.

2 We're sure there are people who look good in gold lamé miniskirts. Somewhere...

1
2
>Username: BionicWonder

USERNAME: QUIQUELOPEZ

A heart-felt homage to *Dorf on Golf:* You don't want to look, but you have to look, don't you?

USERNAME: JUDIETTE

"Judy, we need to talk about your 'friends'..." It's amazing what some people can consider innocuous and other people can consider terribly disturbing.

ONLINE STARDOM

Cosplay that Funky Music

Coming out of the costume closet

If you're not confident enough about your own unique superstar persona, just reach into your closet (you know, the one only your special convention friends know about) and pull out your favorite ready-to-wear pop-culture identity.

1 You don't really need singing ability to make it in music these days—it's all about the image anyway. And like a helpless victim of the Jedi mind trick, you *will* watch a Wookie dance whether he sings or not.

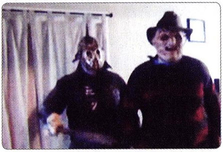
2 But if you're going to forgo vocals and focus on costume and dance, you'll need to sweat the details. First-rate dance moves and meticulous outfits are de rigueur if you're going to stand out in this burgeoning sub-genre.

>Username: Welsh Sossy

SingStar's Most Wanted

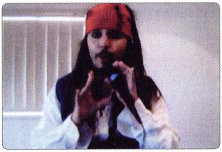
In the early stages of our research for this story, we came across one of the most entertaining videos on My SingStar Online. Unfortunately, we made the discovery before we realized that videos enjoy a limited amount of time in the spotlight—neglect to note the username and it can be nearly impossible to relocate a clip once it disappears from the opening page.

Our favorite video was a stunning rendition of Britney Spear's Toxic by a skull head sporting a flowing red wig. If you happen across this masterpiece during your *SingStar* travels, let us know so we can give it the recognition it so richly deserves.



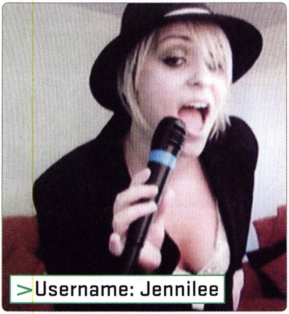
USERNAME: DARKHAWK76

A Nightmare on Friday the 13th—the musical? Curiously, horror movie villains are a consistent *SingStar* favorite. Murderous slashers apparently need social gaming love, too.



USERNAME: MULLETINO

For some reason, we don't think this is a costume. We can totally envision Mulletino chatting up the ladies at the local drinking hole with his pirate speak. *"Arrgh! Care to hoist Capt. Jack's sail, mi lady?"*



>Username: Jennilee

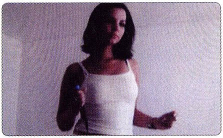
SingStar Sexy

If you've got it, flaunt it

Yeah, we know, life's not fair. But the fact remains, if you're attractive, you're going to get some breaks based on appearance alone. In real-life, these ladies would get free drinks, a pass on speeding tickets, and never have to pony-up for a dinner check. On *SingStar,* they'll get the high ratings and adoration regardless of their talent. The moral? Be a hottie.

USERNAME: CYBERVIXEN

USERNAME: DUTCH-REBEL



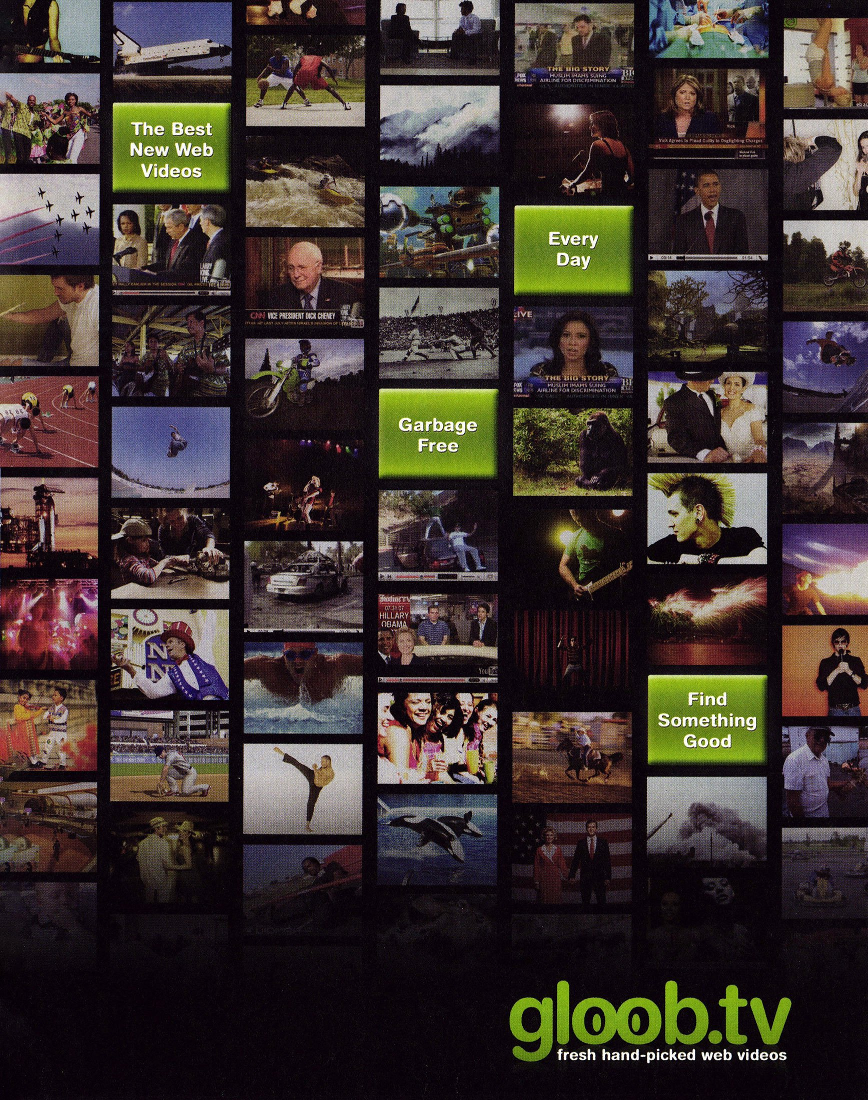
USERNAME: DORDRECHT

USERNAME: MEL_MEL

USERNAME: TIGERLILLEY

USERNAME: ONLYINMANCHESTER

Rob's embarassingly favorite *SingStar* song: Wizzards's I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday. "It reminds me of me mum's Christmas puddin', it does. When I was but a wee lad..."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PlayStation Network Games

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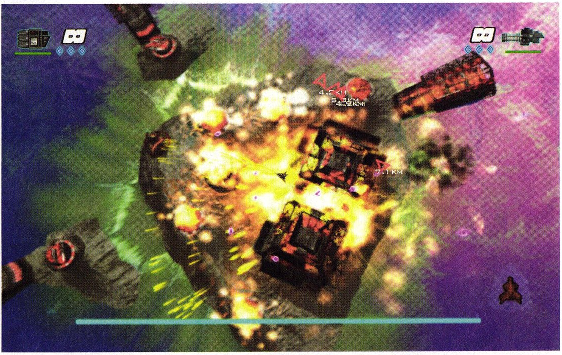
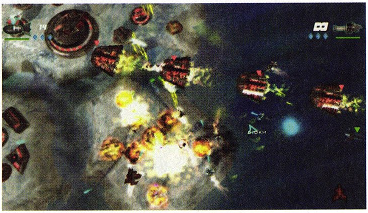
+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

− **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.



Novastrike

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** Tiki Games



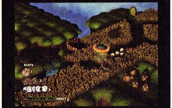
− If you've played any of the top-down arcade shooters on the PSN lately, you know the formula: left analog to move and dodge, right analog to aim and shoot. *Novastrike,* however, tugs us back a decade or two, to the era when aim was limited to the region directly in front of you—back when you had to dodge an enemy's gunfire by maneuvering away and then swinging back around to face them head-to-head if you wanted to shoot back.

You control the Scythe, an aircraft utilizing both human and alien tech, and you hop from planet to planet eliminating the encroaching Draelus threat. Each planet is a free-roaming, mission-based stage, and you traverse past alien and ally bases to accomplish your tasks. Goals include escorting unarmed civilian caravans, destroying enemy bases, and intercepting enemy bombers before they reach a human base. The highlight of *Novastrike* is the amount of detail infused into the enemy: You'll encounter all sorts of aircraft, from kamikaze pilots to sprawling carriers—and the enemy structures are equally as diverse, ranging from anti-air cannons to aircraft launching pads. Prioritizing which structures and units to eliminate first becomes a challenge in itself.

Novastrike's low point arises from the combination of its almost insurmountably clumsy control scheme and its insane (but also intensely rewarding) difficulty scale. You use the left analog to move, R2 to shoot your primary weapon (against air threats), and L2 to shoot your secondary weapons (against land units). R1 and L1 cycle through their respective weapon types, but accessing the right weapon just when you need it is cumbersome. The analog control is also too sensitive, which creates a steep learning curve for maneuvering.

We appreciate the little details in *Novastrike*—how it takes a few realistic but painful seconds for your missile to reach the anti-air cannon it's locked-on to, for example—but many gamers won't be up to the challenge. Teresa Dun

PSN Preview



Flock **DEVELOPER:** Proper Games

Using a UFO to herd farm animals—sheep, cows, chickens, and pigs—is not the most obvious premise for a puzzle game. But it'll be hard to knock this PSN release that hopes to capture the essence of puzzle classics like *Lemmings.* When you figure out that cows bulldoze through barriers, and pigs roll through wheat fields, you're left with an intriguing setup for each of the 50 maps (with more available through user-created levels).

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month:

METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
DATABASE

▶ METAL GEAR SOLID 4 DATABASE

This 77MB download is like a wikipedia of all things *Metal Gear*—except it's on your PS3, has nifty sound effects, and is 100-percent Konami-approved. This free *MGS4* add-on pack covers all the events and characters from *Metal Gear, Metal Gear 2, Metal Gear Solid, MGS2, MGS3, MGS4,* and *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops.* While it's text-heavy, navigating through the info is a breeze. Included are character profiles, a character relationship diagram, and a timeline of events (all conveniently cross-linked). If you haven't beaten *MGS4* yet, you won't be able to access any spoilers (the database checks for a completed save game). Remember to check the Extras menu of your *MGS4* game, too, for some special, free downloadable content.

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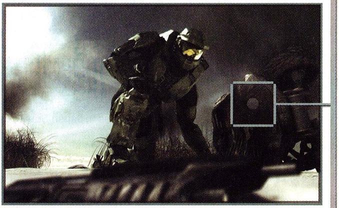

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Letters

Feedback, Insight, PSN PMS, and Xbox fa(i)llacies

> "I don't know if they are clueless or just lazy, but the money would come pouring in if they posted *Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy VII–IX, Chrono Cross, Vagrant Story.*" >>

TOUGH LOVE

To quote the great Zach de la Rocha from Rage Against the Machine: "Here is something you can't understand..." I have been a longtime Sony supporter (my first console ever was the original PlayStation) and I can't help but feel that lately Sony has really hung its American support out to dry, particularly with the PlayStation Network. Don't get me wrong, I think that Sony has always followed through with quality hardware and software, even though they have been late to the party quite a few times. I feel that Sony is overcompensating in its Europe and Japan markets in order to secure its presence against the Wii and Xbox 360. In Europe and especially Japan, the PSone downloads are flourishing. They both have gotten *Metal Gear Solid,* and in Japan Square Enix has just signed an exclusive deal to put 20 titles from their own library on PSN for download. In the U.S., we get absolutely nothing. There are maybe five titles that I would allow on my PSP, and when they're put on the network, it's months between each. What kills me is that Sony is sitting on a gold mine with PSN, especially with PlayStation titles. I don't know if they are clueless or just lazy, but the money would come pouring in if they posted *Metal Gear Solid*, *Final Fantasy VII–IX*, *Chrono Cross*, *Vagrant Story*. The possibilities are endless. I mean, the PlayStation has one of the most expansive game libraries in history! What makes me scream out in frustration is the fact that now Sony is complaining about piracy on the PSP, especially emulation. I know that myself and others would be happy to download games off PSN instead of downloading complicated pirate software if the library was quality. It would be so much easier. Sony really needs to catch up.

So guys at PTOM—I'm looking at you, Rob Smith—the next time you talk to a Sony executive, bring this up because everyone in the U.S. is being hung out to dry. Slap them around for all I care. Sony's neglect of the U.S. PSN is almost criminal.

Cullen Lea, Wimington, NC

OK, Cullen...deep breaths. It's not nearly as bad as you seem to think. But we agree with your overall point: PSN is an incredible opportunity that we have yet to see fully and properly exploited. The positive spin? Whereas the other guys might've tapped out already, we have yet to see everything PS3 and PSN have to offer. Expect some big news out of this year's E3, and some even bigger news by the end of this year!

REFER MADNESS

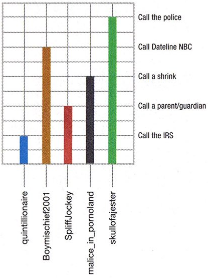
I saw in your review of *Lego Indy* that you talk about *Star Wars* references, particularly one about

Random quote from a Canadian email we won't be running:

"It might be because I'm Canadian, but I don't think the cold and snow really got to me up in the head. The igloo we live in are pretty warm." *—Ryan Robinson, Crysler, Ontario*

What's in a name?

Everyone likes nicknames, especially when it comes to emails. But c'mon—some of the names on the emails we get are just...disturbing. We rank this month's crop.



LETTER OF THE MONTH

VICTORY IS OURS!

First off: PTOM for the win!

Now, I have been observing this "console war" on the battlefields where it's normally waged: Internet forums. And still I am seeing the same argument by Xbots over and over: PS3 HAS NO GAMES!

This statement, I believe, is full of epic fail.

When I look at both the PS3 and the 360, they each have their "system" games that make us remember that particular system. For PS3, we have *Resistance* (best game at launch), *Motorstorm* (most sold game on PS3), *Killzone* (best-looking game), *LittleBigPlanet* (most innovative game EVER) and *MGS4* (DUH!).

For 360, we have *Halo* (mundane FPS! Yay!), *Gears of War* (slightly interesting shooter that's also on PC), *Mass Effect* (not a JRPG, and is also on PC, seeing a trend?), *Fable* (great track record from the developer >_>) and *BioShock* (coming to PS3). Am I the only one that sees the major difference here?

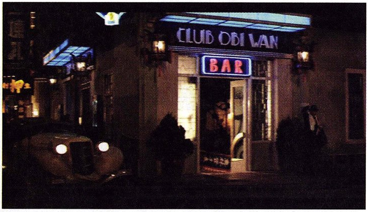
Everyone claims that the 360 has LOADS of exclusives. Three of its five biggest games aren't. The rest of their exclusive lineup is pretty forgettable. Example: Remember *Earth Defense Force 2017?* What about *Project Sylpheed? Vampire Rain?* They're all 360 exclusives.

Sure, they have *DOA4* and *Dead Rising,* but nothing else in their lineup even piques my interest—aside from *Ninja Gaiden 2,* but we have *Sigma*, so that kind of balances itself out.

On PS3, we have loads of other good games, such as *Uncharted, Warhawk, GT5 Prologue, Heavenly Sword, Ratchet & Clank Future,* as well as awesome upcoming exclusives (like JRPGs!) and others like *SOCOM: Confrontation, Tekken 6, Final Fantasy 13* (and *Versus)* and...*GOD OF WAR 3!*

So whenever some Xbot noob comes rolling by and starts bashing, please give them a nice whack in the face by showing them this list. Then direct them to the nearest failboat.

Carlos Morales, via email



Club Obi Wan. You said that LucasArts put it in the game. I don't know how well you know your Indy movies, but that is the name of the club in *Temple of Doom*. Just thought you would like to know.

Collin Franson, via email

Although you're absolutely right, Gary is still clinging to the notion that he was technically correct. Because, technically, LucasArts did put that reference into the game—even though it was already there in the movie. So, we're not really flogging Gary this month; we're, technically, uh, tenderizing him with leathery strips. So he will be more delicious. Yeah, that's it.

NO, YOU CAN'T HAVE OUR JOBS

You probably get this all the time, but how could I get a career as a videogame critic? Is there a college major you would recommend pursuing?

Kyle Matthews, via email

We recommend that you major in animal husbandry.

SWAP TRICK

Hi, I have a question. Since when did Xbox 360 port a game to PS3? It would benefit both companies. They can do an exchange. Port *Halo 3* to PS3. Port *MGS4* to Xbox 360.

David Derejko, via email

We recommend that you major in international relations and apply your brilliant mind to solving peace in the Middle East.

ROLE REVERSAL

Is the RPG genre a dying breed? Where are all the RPGs for the PS3? I know *FF XIII* and *Fallout 3* are on the horizon, but those can't be the only two games. What happened to the fantasy RPGs and turn-based action? The PlayStation one and 2 were great systems with so many RPG choices, but the PS3 is lacking. The only RPG I currently own for the PS3 is *Oblivion*, and while it's a good game, it plays just like all the other PC RPGs. I want the old-school RPGs! Is there anything to look forward to, or has this new generation of gaming ousted the classic RPG genre for good?

Brian Chioffe, New York

We're with you—up to a point. Japanese RPGs are definitely in lesser supply on PS3, but that said, JRPGs have been somewhat stagnant in the past few years. (Story sequence, random battle, repeat ad nauseam.) The innovation is really coming more from the U.S. side, with games like *Oblivion* and narrative-driven action/adventures like *BioShock* changing the way we see console RPGs. Still, we can point to a few more old-school (read: Japanese) RPGs headed to PS3 that you should be giddy about, including *Valkyria Chronicles* and *Disgaea 3*. Those will definitely keep you happy this coming holiday season!

SCARE ME

Years back, the release of the first *Silent Hill* game compelled me to finally buy a PSone. I went out and bought the game and the system and I was immediately addicted. The eerie soundtrack and disturbing storyline made the game even better, and I was completely hooked. Later, I purchased a PS2 and bought the sequel to the game. Even though it wasn't as great as the original *Silent Hill*, I still loved it. I now own the whole series of games and I'm anticipating the release of *Silent Hill 5* so that I can finally drop down that $500 to buy a PS3. Survival-horror videogames are my favorite to play. I just love them. I was wondering if there's news of any other videogames akin to the *Silent Hill* series coming out soon. I would definitely like to hear about them and see if I can find a brand-new horror inspiration.

Jim Handley, via email

We've got three for you: *Siren: Blood Curse,* an atmospheric, episodic zombie-thon with a very J-horror look and feel; *Dead Space*—flip back to page 40 for more on that one; and *Resident Evil 5* (duh). All three will scare the bejeebus out of you. We guarantee it.

POP QUIZ

Pick "B" if you're not sure.

1. *BioShock* is considered the spiritual successor to which game series?
a) System Shock
b) Far Cry
c) Shadowrun
d) Bio Freaks

2. Which of the following isn't a new character in *Street Fighter IV?*
a) Crimson Viper
b) Rufus
c) Cain
d) El Fuerte

3. What is Peter Parker's middle name?
a) Albert
b) James
c) Pablo
d) Benjamin

4. Who was the first unseeded tennis player to win Wimbledon?
a) Björn Borg in 1977
b) Boris Becker in 1985
c) Roger Federer in 2003
d) Maria Sharapova in 2004

5. What was the number one song on the Billboard charts when *SingStar Rocks!* released for the PS2?
a) Irreplaceable – Beyoncé
b) White & Nerdy – Weird Al Yankovic
c) London Bridge – Fergie
d) My Love – Justin Timberlake

6. What is "Panda Diplomacy"?
a) Giving pandas as diplomatic gifts to other countries in order to promote good relations
b) Two male pandas exchanging bamboo in return for rights to feed in another's territory
c) Females "babysitting" other females' offspring while the other females eat
d) A politician who emphasizes that laws are either black or white

7. Which of the following was not a Top 40 Single for Aerosmith?
a) Come Together
b) Last Child
c) Train Kept A-Rollin'
d) Janie's Got a Gun

8. Which PS3 firmware update added Folding@home?
a) 1.31
b) 1.60
c) 1.93
d) 2.01

9. In *Civilization Revolution,* the leader for Japan is:
a) Tokugawa Ieyasu
b) Kyoko Yamashita
c) Oda Nobunaga
d) Hattori Hanzo

10. Who designed *flOw?*
a) Aerith Goldberg
b) Cloud Choi
c) Jenova Chen
d) Yuffie Witoski

Answers: 1.a; 2.c; 3.d; 4.b; 5.d; 6.a; 7.c; 8.b; 9.a; 10.c

contact i Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. If we get enough, Rob says we can trade them in for candy and toys.

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If you haven't downloaded and experienced Qore, the next step in digital entertainment and information on your PlayStation 3, now you have no excuse. Using the code below you can download the inaugural episode of Qore from the PlayStation Network, straight to your PS3.

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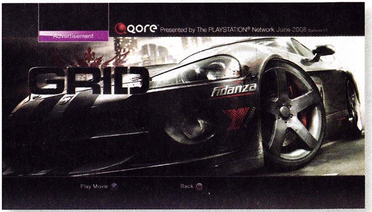
> "Episode 1 of Qore also brings you the inside scoop on the hotly anticipated *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed,* including interviews with the creative team behind this next great step for the legendary sci-fi series."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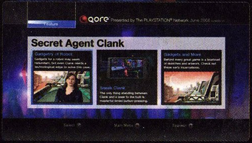
Qore content includes gameplay movies as well as developer interviews and special features. Whatever you do, however, DON'T press L2!

Next month

In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

We go deep inside Sony Online Entertainment's Austin studio to get hands-on time with ***DC Universe Online,*** the massively multiplayer action game that is set to revolutionize the genre on PS3. Plus, the very first reveal of ***The Godfather II,*** and hands-on with ***Yakuza 2*** and ***Valkyria Chronicles.*** And the review season heats up with ***Soulcalibur IV*** and ***Disgaea 3*** leading the charge. Don't miss it!

Qore host Veronica Belmont


Feature
Qore Presented by The PLAYSTATION® Network June 2008
Secret Agent Clank
Gadgetry of Robot
Sneak Clank
Gadgets and More
Select
Main Menu

Gadgets for a robot may seem redundant, but even Clank needs a technological edge to solve this case.

The only thing standing between Clank and a laser to the butt is masterful timed button-pressing.

Behind every great game is a boatload of sketches and artwork. Check out these early incarnations.

Qore Presented by The PLAYSTATION® Network June 2008 Episode 01
SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS
CONFRONTATION
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs
Confrontation
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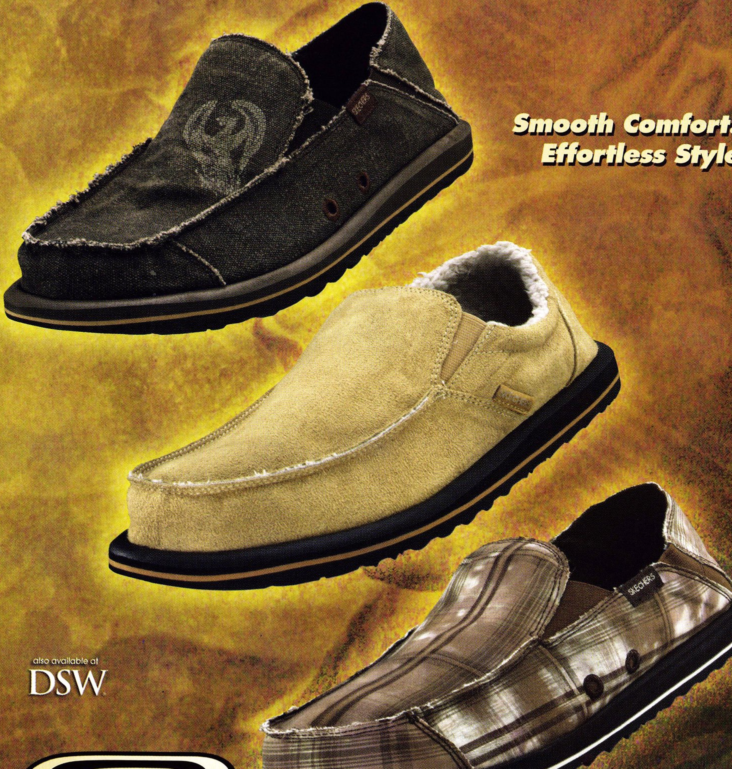

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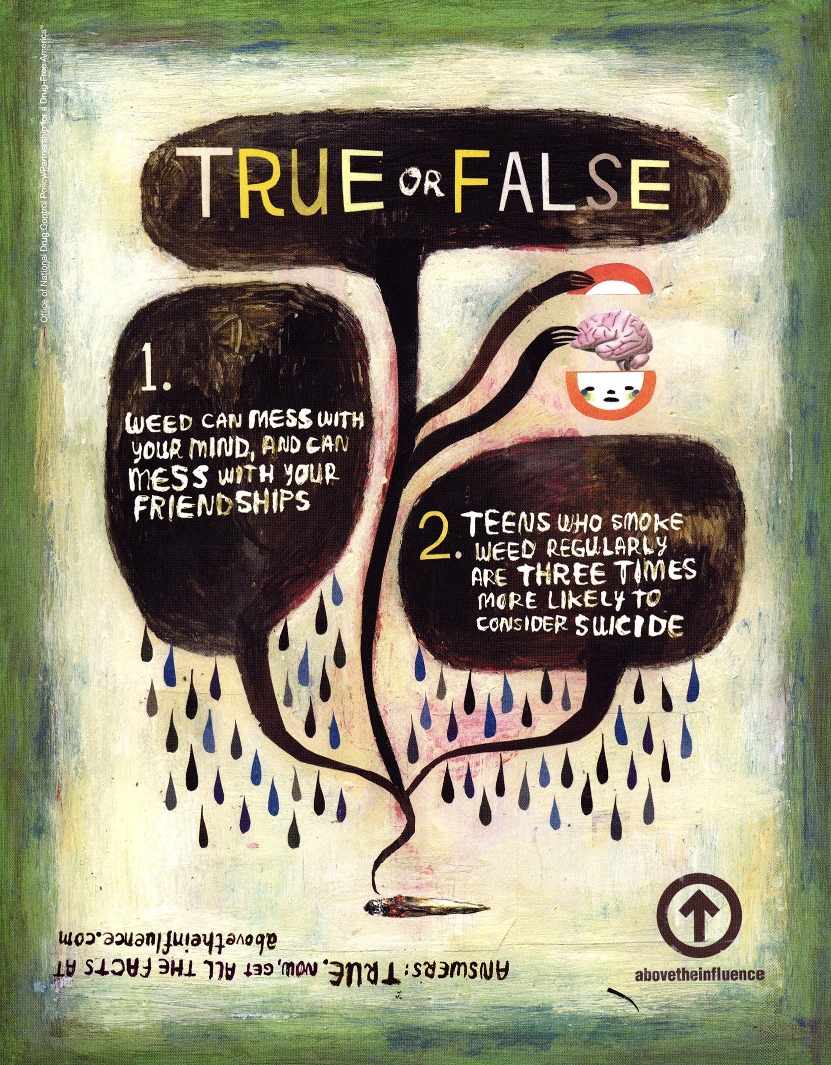

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